This is Sabotage

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This is Sabotage

by shadowblade_tara

Summary

They are synonymous with death to all who cross them. The best the Autobot forces have. And that was before the new tactial officer Prowl joined their ranks. This is Jazz's team, and they don't know how to lose. Cross-posted from FF.net under same pen name.

first impressions

It takes a special kind of mech to be a special ops tactician.

Gunner knows this. As head of Ultra Magnus' special ops teams, he knows all too well how a tactical officer can make or break a spec ops team. He's seen tacticians break under the pressure – and consequently break the teams as well.

And now he's watching it happen all over again.

In his defense, Firestar was never cut out for this. His tactics work best when he has time to think about what's going on and assess all possible outcomes. He's panicking, close to breaking, and this time he's going to kill them all. Out of the five-mech team that went in, only two are still alive – Gunner's second, Jazz, and the spy Mirage.

"I need five minutes!" Firestar says, typing furiously on his data pad. Gunner has to give the mech credit – he's trying. It's just not enough. "Please, Jazz, hold your position for five more minutes!"

"We don' got five minutes, mech!" And there's Jazz, not quite panicking but clearly in no position to attempt calm for Firestar's sake. *"We got thirty seconds, tops. Get us outta here!"*

"I'm trying!"

The doors slide open and another mech walks in. He's one of the new tactical, Gunner knows – a black and white Praxian who rarely speaks and for the most part keeps to himself. He's not part of Magnus' team. He's just on a holdover until his new unit is ready for him. Gunner dismisses him quickly. He's not part of the equation. His specialty is going to be large-scale combat. He's of no use to Gunner.

Still, the Praxian walks right up to Firestar's computer and takes in the intel. He can clearly see the problem – there's only one way out and in, and there's at least 20 Decepticons standing on the other side of that exit. The door will only hold for so long. They're going to die. Firestar's hands are shaking, coolant tears sliding down his cheeks as he realizes he's going to lose them all.

The Praxian reaches past him and pushes the comm button. "Jazz, this is Tactical Officer Prowl. Do you copy?"

“What are you doing?” Gunner demands. Prowl ignores him in favor of the display screen.

“Loud ‘n clear, Prowl.”

“Good. I need you to do exactly as I say, and I will get you out of this alive.”

Jazz chuckles tiredly. *“Don’ need yer empty promises, mech. Just need a plan.”*

Prowl’s optics darken considerably. They’re almost black now. “Good. Here is your plan.”

What he suggests is dangerous and insane. Gunner watches the screen intently, wondering if Jazz will go for it. To his shock, the response is short and terse. *“Got it.”*

As Prowl predicted, they lose contact with the team. Comms are down, and Firestar has to leave the room. He’s shaking too hard, completely useless to the team as he is. This might be his last ops mission, Gunner muses, assuming Jazz and Mirage make it back. Prowl stands there a moment longer, staring blankly at the screen. Gunner watches him.

“What are you waiting for?” he asks finally.

“A message of execution.” Prowl replies tersely. “If this didn’t work, in two minutes, we will know. The Decepticons will use Jazz’s transmission to tell us we lost our team. If we don’t hear in two minutes, then they lived, and the plan worked.”

Gunner nods, surprised by the confidence in Prowl’s voice. “And if they made it?”

Prowl spares him a glance. “Then you will need to send a retrieval team.” He returns his attention to the screen with an intensity that Gunner has only ever seen once before. It’s the same intensity that made him pay more attention to Jazz than the others and make him his second on the team. A slow smile spreads across his face.

“I hear you’re destined for large-scale combat.”

“That is where Optimus Prime wants me.”

“I think you might be better suited to special ops.”

Prowl's doorwings twitch. One fist clenches ever so briefly, and Gunner has to laugh at that. "You know it, too. That's why you're in here. You're trying to learn from Firestar."

That gets his first honest reaction out of the mech. He snorts. "Hardly. Firestar is a good mech, but he's no spec ops mech. I came here because I heard there was trouble. I wanted to see if I could help."

At that moment, precisely three minutes later, the comms flare to life once again. *"This is Jazz. We're out. We made it out."*

A small smile flickers across Prowl's face. "Thank Primus." he whispers. Louder, he adds, "We're sending help. Hang in there, Jazz."

"Roger tha'. Thanks, mech."

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Prowl leaves before Jazz gets back.

Gunner considers the options as he meets his mechs in the med bay. Surprisingly, they're not very injured considering the exit they had to take. He stands there quietly as Mirage gives the report – Jazz is completely distracted, not even complaining as the medic does his work.

At the end, Gunner nods. "All right. Thank you, Mirage. I want both of you to get some rest. Firestar needs to be cleared by psych – "

"No."

Jazz's voice cuts across Gunner's words. He blinks. "You don't think Firestar will be cleared?"

"Ah'm sayin' Ah don' want that mech anywhere near mah team." Jazz retorts.

"We need tactical, Jazz." Mirage says quietly. "Everyone knows that. Spec ops need a real-time tactical advantage."

"Ah know that, 'Raj. But not Firestar." Jazz crosses his arms over his chassis and glares up at Gunner. "Ah want Prowl."

Gunner grins. This he was totally anticipating. "Prowl isn't one of ours."

"Well *make him* one."

“You want me to go up to Optimus Prime and ask him for his tactical officer back?”

“Yep.”

Gunner shakes his head. “He won’t go for it.”

Jazz grins. There is nothing kind about his smile. “He will if he wants us runnin’ ops. I ain’ goin’ back out there without Prowl in mah ear. He got us out of there alive.”

Gunner nods. “I’ll consider that. In the meantime, get some rest. I mean it, both of you. You earned it.” With that he walks out of the med bay.

This could be entertaining.

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“You want what?”

Yeah, this is going about as well as Gunner imagined. Optimus looks less than thrilled to hear from him, even through the vid screen. “You heard me. There’s a mech named Prowl – “

“I know who Prowl is. He is assigned to my unit as a combat tactical officer.”

“With all due respect, Prime, that’s a waste of his talents.” Gunner says calmly. “He’s much better suited to ops.” The battle mask hides Prime’s scowl, but Gunner knows he’s scowling anyway. Perks of being ops. “He walked into that situation, assessed it, and had a workable plan in literally about 20 seconds. That’s impressive. No one I’ve ever met can do that.”

Optimus sighs. *“Gunner, I hear you. But Prowl is my mech, and I won’t assign him to ops so young. Ops wears on mechs in a way regular battles don’t.”*

Before Gunner can argue the point, the door to the meeting room opens and Jazz waltzes in. He nods to Gunner before turning his focus to Optimus. “Sorry, Gunner – diplomacy ain’ gettin’ us anywhere.” he says. “Look, Prime – Ah get that Prowl is *yer mech*, but mah team *needs him.* He saved our afts. We ain’ goin’ back out without him. Are we clear?”

There's a very long silence as Optimus just stares at Jazz and Gunner tries to hide his laughter. Slowly, very slowly, Optimus nods.

"A trial run. You have him for two months, then he's back with my team. Clear?"

Jazz flashes him a wicked grin. "Crystal."

Gunner finally snorts in laughter. In two months, Prowl will be Jazz's mech. He can already tell.

let's make this official

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Prowl becomes aware that something has changed when the transport turns around mid-air. He pulls out his data pad and quickly hacks into the Autobot personnel files. His new orders are there, plain as day, along with a notification to contact Optimus Prime as soon as he is able. Prowl can't help but smirk.

Looks like fate is on his side after all.

Gunner meets him at the entrance to the base when he returns. He looks vastly amused above all else. "Looks like we've got you for two whole months." he says.

Prowl nods. "So I suspected. It's a good thing you caught me in Syph – if my transport had made it to Iacon, Prime might have decided to keep me."

"Nah. There's a mech I think would hunt you down if that happened." Gunner says easily. He motions for Prowl to follow him and guides him into the base. "As you know, right now our spec ops team is rather limited. I've got 10 new trainees coming in from the Academy, but for now, you'll be working with just Jazz and Mirage."

Prowl nods. "What were their injuries?"

"All things considered, minimal. They were released from the med bay three days after we got them back."

Prowl relaxes a little at that, although his face doesn't show his relief. He has no doubt Gunner can see it either way. "That is good." he murmurs.

"That is very good." Gunner agrees. He stops in the rec room, which is completely empty at this time of night. He turns to face Prowl, expression completely serious for once. "Look. I've done my research on you. Your talents are excellent, beyond reproach. Your personal reputation, on the other hand, is kind of frightening. Most mechs peg you as being too in control when they're feeling generous, and sparkless when they're not."

Prowl clenches his fist. “I’m very well aware of the rumors.” he says. “I will not apologize for doing my job and doing it well.”

“To the exclusion of personal relationships?”

“It is difficult for me to relate to others, even without my ambition, but I am not friendless.” Prowl replies dryly. “Neither am I emotionless. If the others cannot see it, I do not feel the need to enlighten them. All that matters is keeping the mechs that I have been entrusted with alive.”

Gunner considers those words for a moment before nodding. “I can work with that. Follow me – it’s late, so introductions can wait until tomorrow. I’ll show you to your quarters.”

“Ah got ‘im, mech.”

Both mechs turn to see a visored black and white mech – from Polyhex, if the accent is anything to go by – standing in the doorway of the rec room. Gunner nods. “I leave him to you, then.” With that he turns and walks away.

The new mech waits until they’re alone before approaching Prowl. Prowl just stands there, mildly curious, until the mech is an arm’s length away. “Designation Jazz. Ya saved mah life.” He sticks out his hand. “Thank ya.”

Slowly, Prowl reaches out and shakes his hand. “Designation Prowl. And it was my pleasure.” He tilts his helm to the side, studying Jazz intently. “I’m guessing you’re the one who put up enough of a fuss to get Prime to transfer me?”

Jazz grins. “What can Ah say? Ah like havin’ the best on mah team.”

Prowl raises an optic ridge. “I’m still technically in training.” he points out. “I know you’ve read my file.”

“Ah did.” Jazz says unrepentantly. “An’ if that’s what ya can do while yer in trainin’, Ah’m lookin’ forward ta findin’ out what ya can do when ya finish.” He pauses for a moment, tilting his helm as he examines Prowl. It’s like being put under a microscope, but Prowl refuses to flinch. Jazz grins. “Ah also know yer pretty young ta have gotten this far.”

“I am not a sparkling, Jazz.” Prowl says, an edge to his voice that he can’t quite hide and doesn’t try too hard to. His age has always been a

point of contention between him and his comrades.

Jazz holds up a hand, stalling him. “Ah know. Even if ya were age-wise – which ya ain’ – ya definitely not in yer spark. No sparklin’ could have pulled off what ya did.” He grins. “Welcome ta mah team, Prowler. Let’s get ya settled in.”

Prowler. No one has ever given him a nickname before. Prowl simply follows Jazz to the barracks. They don’t speak much. Jazz points out various places of interest as they go (along with what areas to avoid) and Prowl nods and commits them to memory. They stop in front of a particular door and Jazz keys it open.

“Raj! We got our mech!”

That startles Prowl. “You share quarters with your teammates?” he asks.

“Always.” Mirage says, approaching the door. “Usually tactical doesn’t stay with us – I imagine Gunner would have taken you to the regular quarters – but Jazz wanted you here with us for a while.” He reaches out and shakes Prowl’s hand. “I’m Mirage – the other mech you saved.” He doesn’t say thank you or anything, and for that Prowl is grateful. Jazz lets the door close behind him.

“Ya c’n take th’ bunk in the back.” he says, pointing it out. Prowl nods and proceeds to make himself at home. He’s not surprised to be moved to the back. The TO is one of the most important positions on an ops team (the first being the leader), and this bunk is the most easily defended.

He doesn’t recharge well that night, but that will change. This is a step in the right direction. Prowl knows it.

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The next morning, Prowl reports in to Optimus Prime. The connection is secure, and Magnus has cleared the communications room so he won’t be interrupted. More importantly, there are things that need to be said that would reveal a truth Prowl does not want anyone else finding out.

Prime has his battle mask removed for the moment. *“I’m glad your transport made it back in one piece.”*

Prowl nods. “You did not have me contact you just so you could wish me well, Optimus.” he says quietly. Prime flinches a little, but he nods reluctantly.

“What were you thinking poking your nose into ops matters?”

“Would you rather I have left those mechs to die?”

“You know exactly how I feel about special ops.”

Prowl snorts. “You deem them a necessary evil. Something you can’t deny we need, but it flies in the face of your weird morality. For some reason, you think having special ops makes us more Decepticon-like.” Prime nods. Prowl shakes his helm. “You know it doesn’t.”

“Underhanded tactics are Megatron’s specialty.”

“Yes, but Megatron has all the subtlety of a thrown brick.” the younger mech retorts. “Our mechs can actually get the job done with a minimal amount of collateral damage.”

For a long moment, the two just stare at each other. Finally, Optimus sighs. *“You know, creations are not supposed to be wiser than their creators.”* There’s a lifetime of warmth in those words, and Prowl’s doorwings relax a hair. *“I have never understood your need for ops.”*

“It’s nothing I can explain.” Prowl admits. “But I know this is where I need to be.”

Optimus nods. *“I gave Gunner two months.”*

“I doubt Jazz will let me go after that.” Prowl retorts, a wry smile twisting his lips. “Jazz is the driving force behind Gunner’s top team. He wants nothing but the best to protect his mechs.”

“You sound like you already respect him.”

“I do.”

“All right, Prowl. It seems there’s nothing I can do about it. Two months – if Gunner and Jazz still want you on the team, you’ll stay there. But I’m still going to worry – that’s my job.”

“Worry about the army.” Prowl says with a smile. “I can take care of myself.” With that said, they sign off.

Jazz waits for him just outside the comms room. Prowl pauses. “How

much did you hear?" he asks hesitantly. Jazz flashes him a grin.

"Enough. Don' worry about me. Ah got my own secret with Magnus."

Understanding flashes across Prowl's face, and he smiles. "Thank you."

"C'mon. We got trainin' ta do."

Chapter End Notes

> Wow! Thank you guys so much for the reviews and support, I'm loving it! For those of you who follow this story over on FF.net, it's a double update for you. For those of you who are just hanging around on this site, I'll be updating rather frequently as I get to internet access. I'm aiming for every Friday, but as you can tell, that didn't happen this time. So you'll get updates at least once a week, maybe more.

learning each other

Until the first of the new mechs come in from the Academy, Jazz and Mirage are on vacation. The higher-ups view it as a great chance for the high strung mechs to relax and enjoy themselves.

Prowl sees differently.

He watches Jazz and Mirage in the sparring room. The fight has gotten vicious enough to clear out the area. No one wants to be on the wrong side of the clearly agitated ops mechs. There's a dent in the far wall where Mirage threw Jazz into it. That was when someone went to get Prowl.

What he's seeing now is the tail end of the fight. Both mechs are clearly exhausted. They're going to drop soon, but once their energy levels rise, this is going to happen again. Prowl crosses his arms over his chassis and considers.

Before the two mechs can realize (or acknowledge) he's there, Prowl is gone. He needs Ultra Magnus' approval for what he plans to do.

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"So let me get this straight." Magnus says dryly. "You want permission to take over use of the science wing so Jazz and Mirage can play what basically amounts to paintball."

Prowl inclines his head. "Essentially, yes."

"Why?"

"Training, sir."

Magnus shakes his helm. "They're on vacation. That means no training. They're on this vacation until the new mechs come in."

Prowl's fist clenches, but it's the only sign of his rising aggravation. "May I speak freely, Magnus?"

"You may."

"You're treating the ops mechs like you would normal soldiers. This is possibly the dumbest thing you've done aside from assigning Firestar to be their tactician." Magnus bristles, but Prowl continues. "Jazz and

Mirage are not normal mechs. Downtime does nothing for them but make them even more aggravated. This is only making an already tense situation worse. They need to train, they need to be running ops, and barring both of those, they need to be doing *something constructive*."

"So your solution is to make them play paintball."

"My solution is to set up a scenario that allows them to at least pretend like they're training and allow them to burn off excess energy without killing each other." Prowl retorts. "I'm sure you've gotten the reports by now. Jazz and Mirage are still fighting – and yes, it's as bad as the reports seem."

Magnus sighs and leans back in his chair. "You have a point." he admits. "Every time they have downtime, this slag happens. Very well – you may have your science wing. But on one condition." Prowl inclines his helm. "Use Wheeljack in the simulations."

"Wheeljack." Prowl hesitates for a moment as he brings up everything he knows about the mech. Inventor, engineer, and completely volatile. His inventions are more likely to explode than actually work the way he intends. Complete disregard for safety or rules. Slowly, he smiles. "He will do very nicely."

"I'm glad you approve. Now go plot elsewhere. You have a terrifying smile."

Prowl doesn't bother to acknowledge that. He simply nods his thanks and leaves to find Wheeljack.

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Three days later, Jazz finally manages to corner Prowl in the ops quarters. "Whatcha plannin', mech?"

Prowl merely looks up from his datapad. "What makes you assume I'm planning anything?"

"Ya've been sneakin' around." he retorts. "Ah see why yer creators called ya Prowl." Prowl merely smirks. Jazz returns the grin. "So Ah ask again – whatcha plannin'?"

Prowl's datapad beeps at him. He checks the message and grins. "A surprise for you and Mirage, and it's ready now. Come and see." He stands up and motions for Jazz to follow him. Jazz does, comming

Mirage and having the mech join them on the way out.

It surprises Jazz to be led to the science wing, of all places. Magnus doesn't have much to do with the sciences. That's usually Optimus Prime's mechs. Wheeljack uses the place as an area to test his inventions with minimal risk to the rest of the base. In fact, the inventor meets them at the entrance. Prowl nods to him. "Thank you for setting this up."

"Not a problem." Jack says cheerfully. "Always happy to help the ops. Here you go." He hands Prowl three modified weapons and heads off again. "Just tell me I can keep the footage." he calls over his shoulder. Prowl merely arches an optic ridge.

"Assuming we don't take out the cameras." he says with a small amount of amusement. Jack laughs and leaves the area. Jazz turns his attention to Prowl.

"Got somethin' ya wanna tell us?"

"We're going to play a game." Prowl replies. He hands Jazz and Mirage a rifle. "Paint pellets. We each have a different colored paint. There are also paint bombs rigged throughout the labs. We have six hours to play. Whoever scores the most hits wins. However, if you get hit by a bomb – you're out."

There's a moment silence while Jazz and Mirage consider this. Slowly, Mirage grins.

"Well, hell – I'm in."

Jazz laughs. "Let's do it, mechs!"

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Gunner comes back from his training endeavor rather surprised to find his mechs missing. Magnus meets him in the rec room. Gunner glances over at him. "So where are Jazz and Mirage?"

"With Prowl in the science wing." Magnus replies. "Actually, they might be done by now."

"Done doing what?"

"Ask Prowl. Apparently he came up with an idea to help them blow off some steam without killing each other or scaring the slag out of

everyone else."

That's impressive. Gunner has been trying to tell Magnus for years that downtime is a bad idea for his mechs.

Before he can say anything else – I told you so, maybe – the doors to the rec room slide open and Jazz, Mirage, and Prowl enter the room. Mirage and Jazz are laughing, Prowl smiling to himself, and all three mechs are covered in neon purple, orange, and green paint. It surprises Gunner to see how relaxed all three are. It surprises him even more to know that Prowl is walking behind Jazz, and Jazz isn't looking constantly to keep watch on him.

Jazz doesn't even let *Gunner* walk behind him like that, not without constantly checking his position.

Magnus smiles. "Looks like his plan worked. I think I'll let them keep the science wing."

Gunner grins. "I think I want to keep Prowl. He's good for them."

"He's good for Jazz." Magnus retorts. "I may have to have words with Optimus. He owes me a favor anyway."

"I can't picture him letting you keep his tactician." Gunner retorts. "He's got his optic on Prowl for some reason. Although for what, when it's clear that Prowl was sparked for ops, is beyond me."

"Let me handle Optimus. You keep Prowl with Jazz. Keep me updated on them."

Gunner nods as he watches the three mechs get energon and commandeer a table, completely ignoring most of the other mechs around them. Jazz parks himself right next to Prowl, almost in the mech's lap, and Prowl merely tolerates the extra attention with a small smile.

"I don't think we have to worry about that." he muses quietly.

learning each other pt 2

Prowl is like most spec ops mechs – he doesn't blow off steam quite the same way everyone else does. In fact, Jazz isn't sure he's actually seen the mech do anything for fun. Ever.

He's heard the rumors. Hard not to when he works so closely with the mech. They really started after they got Bumblebee from the Academy. Bee knows Prowl through reputation only, and he's nervous about working with the mech. When Jazz asks why, he doesn't get the answer he's expecting.

"Haven't you noticed? The mech is practically sparkless. He doesn't even have emotions."

Jazz's reaction to that was to simply walk away. He can't afford to kick Bee off the team just because they don't see optic to optic on Prowl. But it makes him start watching, and he doesn't like what he sees.

It's clear the other mechs share Bee's opinion. Prowl may not be the friendliest of mechs, but he *is* friendly, and he does show his emotions. It's – distressing – to see the others keep him at arm's distance just because he expresses himself differently than they do.

"I need you to do exactly as I say, and I will get you out of this alive."

Those were not the words of an emotionless mech. That was a promise that Prowl delivered on, and Jazz determines to learn more about this mech that saved his life. At some point, in between the training and the ops they're finally allowed to run again, Jazz will get to know this elusive mech.

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When Jazz wakes up, Prowl is not in the room.

He checks his chronometer. It's late, very late. Every sane mech should be in recharge. Jazz is instantly on alert. Bee is recharging peacefully, but Mirage is awake. Jazz pings his comm, not wanting to wake their newest member just yet.

::How long?::

::Maybe two minutes. That's how long I've been up, and he couldn't

have been gone much longer than that.::

::He leave on his own?::

::That's my assumption. He would have made a fuss otherwise.::

Jazz isn't so sure on that, but he keeps his opinion on that to himself. He can think of three reasons why Prowl would leave without alerting anyone, and it makes his tanks churn. ::Stay here with Bee. Ah'm gonna go find him.::

::Roger that, boss.::

Jazz slinks through the hallways, checking every place Prowl could conceivably be. The science wing is empty, the rec room quiet, the tactical room barren. Finally, he checks with the femme on comms duty for the night. "Hey, ya know where Prowl is?"

"Down in the training room." she says. "Security cameras picked him up about 10 minutes ago. Figured you wouldn't be too far behind."

Jazz has to smirk at that. His protectiveness of his team is the stuff of legends. "He okay?"

"Don't know. Looks like he's just burning off some steam. I never bothered to turn on the sound."

"All righ', Ah'll take care of him. Thanks, Chromia." She just waves at him as he leaves for the training room.

The door slides open at his touch, and the sound that assaults his audios is almost deafening. It's not the kind of music he pictured Prowl liking, either. For some reason, he always suspected Prowl of being a more classical kind of mech, but this is screaming metal. Metal.

And Prowl is *dancing* to it.

Well, dancing is the wrong word. At second glance, Jazz realizes that Prowl is actually practicing a martial art routine, timing his moves to the beat of the music. He has targets set up all around the room for him to hit, the lights are dim and the music is loud, and *damned* if that's not the hottest thing Jazz has ever seen. So he just stands there at the door, watching with complete fascination.

Prowl missteps, his timing off and the technique sloppy, but instead of

getting angry, he simply laughs. He resumes his stance, waits for the right beat, and begins again. Jazz watches the entire thing, visor bright, a small smile on his face.

He waits until the music is over to speak.

“So *this* is how ya relax.”

His voice isn’t that loud, but he has Prowl’s attention. The Praxian just chuckles. “It’s the closest I can come to actual dancing.” he admits, turning to face Jazz. “Did you enjoy the show?”

“Hell yeah.” No point in lying. “Yer damned good, Prowler.” He tilts his helm to the side. “Why not spar wit’ us? Ya’ll git more enjoyment outta it.”

Prowl offers a small smile. “It’s not the fighting part, although I really enjoy that. It’s the music.”

Jazz frowns slightly at that. Suddenly, he gets it. “It’s th’ fact that it’s not part of the job.” he says quietly. “Ya c’n practice yer moves and not worry about messing up. Ya c’n have fun wit’ it.”

“Exactly. Like the paintball games.”

“Except yer a martial artist, an’ shooting doesn’t quite do it fer ya.” Jazz crosses his arms over his chassis and considers. “All right, then. Wanna dance wit’ meh?”

Prowl examines him for a moment. Slowly, he nods. “Sure. I would like that.”

The next song starts as both mechs fall back into fighting stances. Jazz’s stance is a little sloppy, while Prowl’s contains a precision Jazz can’t hope to match. The difference between a street fighter and a martial artist. They take a moment to find the new beat, and Prowl makes the first move.

Neither of them actually attempt to hit each other, although contact is made when they misstep. They’re soft, glancing blows, barely even leaving dents, and Jazz finds himself laughing every time they screw up. They start off slow, but as they get used to each other, they start building up momentum and stop hitting each other. A strike, a parry, a kick, a dodge. All keeping to a beat Jazz never thought about trying to *fight to*. It takes a certain amount of concentration from both of them.

They manage to make it through two songs without hitting each other. Prowl's small smile keeps getting wider, wilder, and suddenly he's laughing – an honest *laugh*, not his usual chuckles – and Jazz can't help but laugh in return.

"There ya are!"

Prowl tilts his helm, but never loses that smile, that wildness about him. "Did I go somewhere?"

Jazz gently taps Prowl's chassis with his fist. "This is th' mech Ah keep gettin' glimpses of. Ya hide yerself well, Prowler. 'm glad Ah got th' chance ta see ya."

Prowl considers this for a moment. "I am not the easiest mech to get to know." he says finally. They've stopped moving, but the music continues in the background. "You are the first mech to even try, despite my distance."

"Ya do that on purpose?"

"No. It's just how I am."

Jazz stares at him. Finally, he just shakes his helm. "Not anymore, mech. Ya got me an' Mirage. Bee'll come around eventually. Ya got mah team now. Yer not alone anymore." That said, he turns around and walks out of the training room. Prowl will come back when he's ready.

"Jazz?"

He glances behind him. Prowl just stares at him, expression calm despite his trembling doorwings. Jazz inclines his helm in question. Prowl meets his gaze evenly. "You are not alone, either. Not as long as I am alive."

Those words carry weight to them. Jazz smiles. "Ya promise?"

"I'll pinky swear on it if you would like."

Jazz laughs. "No need fer that, mech. Ah trust ya. Ah always will."

too good at what you do

The downside to being good at what you do is that everyone wants you.

Gunner knows this better than anyone. There's a reason he's head of Magnus' spec ops. He's better at the politics of things than Jazz is, and Jazz is the only mech around that's as good at things as Gunner is. So Gunner keeps things between the ops teams and the higher-ups running smooth, and Jazz takes care of the actual ops.

Then there's Prowl, who's so good at the tactical side of things that Gunner has had him officially cut from training for the moment. If they can convince Optimus to let them keep the mech, he'll never have to go through training again. Prowl is simply sparked for spec ops planning.

He's a little too good at what he does, just like Jazz. So it doesn't surprise Gunner when Hot Rod comes to him asking for Prowl to run an op.

The three of them are in Gunner's office – himself, Prowl, and Hot Rod. Hot Rod gives Prowl a cursory glance-over before turning his full attention to Gunner. "He'll work for what I need." he says calmly. "I'll return him when the op is completed."

Prowl's optics flicker from Hot Rod to Gunner. "Sir?"

"He wants to borrow you." Gunner says.

"I haven't had time to prepare the team." Prowl says uncertainly.

Gunner shakes his helm. "No. He wants you to run tactical for his team. You would be doing this on your own."

Prowl stills completely. "Run an op without my team?"

Hot Rod snorts. "You're new to this, Prowl, but we do it all the time." he says. "It's not uncommon for teams to loan out their best mechs, and you are the best tactical officer I've ever seen."

"I am only as good as my team." Prow says. "If I'm going to run an op for you, I'm doing it with my team, the team I know and trust. I'm not doing it with yours."

Gunner snorts. “That’s what I told him you would say.” He turns his attention entirely to Prowl. “This is the way we do things. You’re going to have to get used to it. There will be times when other units will borrow Jazz or Mirage. There’s nothing new about this.”

Prowl’s optics darken. “Maybe some things need to change.” he says softly. From anyone else, it would have been funny. From Prowl, it sounds more like a promise – or a threat. For a moment, the tactician just stares at both of them. Hot Rod gives him an expectant look.

“You can either come willingly, or I can have Magnus order it.” he says flatly. “But Prowl – this is the world of ops. If you’re worried about Jazz’s reaction, he will understand.”

“I am not worried about his reaction.” Prowl says quietly. “They are my team. The only other tactical officer here with ops experience is Firestar, and Jazz no longer trusts him. My worry is that they will be sent out and killed while I am being *loaned out.*” His fist clenches. “I will have the same worry when you call on Jazz to be *loaned out*, and I am stuck here unable to watch his back.”

Hot Rod shakes his helm. “That’s not your concern.”

The expression that crosses Prowl’s face is concerning. Gunner doesn’t know what to call it – frustration, anger, surprise – it could be any or all of the above, or something else entirely, and Gunner worries. He’s used to being able to read mechs like a book, but Prowl has a talent for hiding what he’s truly thinking until it’s too late to try to change his mind.

“I need to discuss things with Jazz.” Prowl says finally. His voice is completely bland, giving no hint to what he’s actually thinking. Only his near-black optics prove that he’s thinking anything. “If I am to be loaned out, then he will need to be prepared for it.” He offers a small bow, a sign of respect, and leaves the room.

Hot Rod turns to Gunner. “Something tells me we’re about to regret this.” he says dryly.

Gunner nods. “You and me both, mech.”

/--------/

The rec room is empty (thankfully) when Prowl finally corners Jazz and explains the situation to him. Jazz can only sigh and lean back in his chair. “Ah ain’ surprised.” he says tiredly. “It was only a matter of

time before someone realized ya were that good an' borrowed ya."

"I don't like it." Prowl says. "I don't know these mechs, and I don't know how they operate. And I'm worried about this team."

Jazz smiles at him and leans against his shoulder. "Ya care way too much about us." he teases lightly. "We're th' best. We'll wait fer ya ta get back before we start getting' inta trouble."

Prowl merely nods. He hesitates a moment, then pulls a datafile from his subspace and gives it to Jazz. The visored mech pauses. "Prowler?"

"I've suspected this for a long time now, but I finally have the proof." Prowl explains. "That file contains some rough outlines of extraction plans. You should be able to build from them pretty quickly, but I'd run some simulations if I were you. Just in case."

That startles Jazz. "In case of what, mech?" he demands. "Ya think ya won't – "

Silence falls between them. Of course. Jazz's protectiveness of his team is matched only by Prowl's. If Prowl thinks for one second that he might be forced away from his team when they need him most, he will take measures to make sure they survive. Including giving Jazz information he's not technically supposed to have.

Jazz slides the file into his own subspace. "Ya care way too much about us." he says finally. "Yer supposed ta keep yer distance in ops."

Prowl snorts. "Oh, like you do?" he retorts. "This is the reason Optimus never wanted me here. He was hoping the distance of large-scale combat would keep me from becoming too attached."

"But yer an ops mech at spark." Jazz says with a small laugh. He puts his helm on Prowl's shoulder. He's somewhat surprised Prowl hasn't shrugged him off yet. Even Mirage, who's well used to Jazz's antics, has never tolerated Jazz's tendency towards physical displays for long.

That might have more to do with Hound than anything else, but still. Prowl just rolls with it. He rolls with almost everything he's been dealt so far, but Jazz can feel the tension in his frame, and he knows this time Prowl will only roll so far. "So whatcha gonna do?" he asks finally.

"I suppose I will run this op." Prowl replies darkly. "But when I get back, I might see how much hell I have to raise to get something

changed around here. It's one thing to assign an op to a different team. It's a whole different matter to split up a team that's functioning perfectly to run an op."

Jazz nods. "Ah wish ya luck. I've been beatin' mah head against that wall fer a while now."

Prowl smirks. "Yes, but you do not have my contacts. Yet."

That makes Jazz laugh. "Yer a scary mech, Prowler." he teases. "'m glad yer on mah side."

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Gunner and Jazz watch Prowl leave with Hot Rod the next day. Gunner glances over at Jazz. "He wasn't happy to be leaving." he observes. Jazz just grunts. Gunner continues. "It makes me wonder what happened to change his mind."

"Oh, his mind ain' changed, Gunner." Jazz says with a small grin. "He's jus' bidin' his time. That's all."

"He thinks he can stop ops mechs from being traded?"

"He's gonna give it his best."

"Why? This is how it's always been done."

Jazz just shakes his helm. "Ya really don' know much about him, do ya?" He doesn't give Gunner a chance to respond. "Prowler knows mah team best. Ya think he wants ta be runnin' an op without us? With a team that he barely knows? Ya think he doesn't know all the ways that op can go wrong, just because he don' know the mechs he's workin' with now?"

"He doesn't want to get anyone killed."

"Exactly. Mah team or someone else's."

Gunner nods. "Well, I'm glad one of us understands him." He turns to walk away, but pauses for just a moment. "You will let me know if he turns out to be a problem."

"Ya anticipatin' him ta be one?"

"Not yet. But I don't like mechs I can't read."

Jazz stays silent while Gunner walks away. With a small sigh, he heads back into the base.

acceptable losses

When the reports come in, Prowl is on patrol. Jazz is almost grateful for this. He stands there in shock, flanked by Mirage and Bee, and he has no clue what to even think.

Praxus, gone?

Impossible.

When Prowl finds out, he insists on heading out there to help with the recovery. Jazz insists on going with him. Mirage and Bee refuse to be left behind. In the end, the entire ops team meet with Optimus on the absolute wreck that used to be Praxus.

Prowl stares out at the wasteland, optics pale. Jazz stands close enough to him to feel him trembling. “We don’ gotta be here, Prowler.” he says quietly, for the mech’s audios alone. “Ya know that. We c’n always leave this one ta Prime.”

That earns him a small smile. “It may not have been home for long, but it’s still home.” Prowl says quietly. “I need to see this through.” He calls the rest of the team to him with a wave of his hand. “We need to stick together. Mirage, you’re with Jazz. Bumblebee, with me. Stay in contact with us and home base. If anything happens, we need to know about it immediately.”

The others nod, but Jazz catches the look that crosses Bee’s face. He’s not happy about being paired with Prowl. Still, he agrees with the others and the two head out.

Mirage glances at Jazz. “He’ll figure it out.”

“Ah just hope he does it before he goes an’ frags Prowl off.” Jazz mutters. “Ah don’ care who ya are, there’s only so long a mech c’n go without some kind of positive response from others.”

“He gets that from us.” Mirage points out. “I’m pretty sure you’re *positive* enough for at least three mechs.”

Jazz smiles at that, but it feels flat even to him. “Let’s go.”

/---------/

Bee can’t stop muttering under his breath.

He's pretty sure Prowl can't hear him. Or at the very least, he's not paying attention. Bee's okay with this. He's never been able to see the appeal in Prowl, not the way Jazz and Mirage can. It doesn't matter how good of a tactician Prowl is, Bee just can't feel safe around the mech. Hard to when he doesn't seem to show any emotion or attachment at all.

So he mutters. It's how he copes. If he happens to be muttering shit about Prowl under his breath, well, who cares.

Prowl doesn't say anything about it, anyway. Isn't that just proof that the rumors are true?

"Bumblebee."

"What?"

"Be silent."

Bee stares at him. Prowl has stopped moving, his optics turned off, helm tilted to the side and his doorwings hitched high on his shoulders. Bee frowns. "What are you going on about, mech?" he demands. "We need to keep looking!"

"Shut up!"

His mouth snaps shut. He's trembling in fury, but before he can act, Prowl onlines his optics and takes off to the left, leaving Bee scrambling to keep up.

They don't go far. Prowl skids down an embankment about thirty meters away from where they began and begins shoving aside rubble. Suddenly, he freezes. Bee crouches at the top of the embankment, watching with curiosity. What the frag is the crazy mech doing?

"There you are." Prowl murmurs, speaking to something Bee can't see from this vantage point. He considers jumping down and checking it out, but Jazz has drilled it into his helm often enough to always keep at least one mech on lookout. Prowl is too low to see anything coming at him. In fact, he's too focused on the object in front of him to be aware of anything else. "I'm called Prowl. What's your designation?"

Suddenly, Bee hears it. A sniffle. "Bluestreak."

His optics pale. "Holy shit." he whispers.

Prowl smiles. An actual *smile*, not that twitch of the lips that Bee sometimes sees. “You’re safe now, Bluestreak, I promise you. Can you come to me? I don’t think I can fit in there.”

Bee activates his comm link. ::Bee to Jazz.::

::Jazz here.::

::Get Prime’s medic out here. We found a survivor.::

::Thank Primus.:: Jazz’s utter relief actually manages to shake Bee. ::At least someone found somethin’. Tell Prowl we’re on our way.::

Bee sends back affirmative and cuts the link. He just watches as Prowl continues to smooth-talk the terrified mech (and Primus if he doesn’t look actually younger than Bee himself!) out of hiding and into the open. Bluestreak immediately takes shelter under Prowl’s outstretched arm, and Prowl responds by folding his wings around him and letting the trembling mech cling to him.

It doesn’t escape Bee’s notice that Prowl is trembling as well.

Looks like Jazz was right after all.

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The search is called off. Jazz’s team stays one final night with Optimus Prime’s crew. Optimus tries to catch Prowl, but as soon as they’re cut loose for the night, Prowl vanishes into the base. Bee isn’t really surprised, nor is he surprised that Jazz is the one to go after him. He is, however, surprised at his decision to follow them.

Jazz might kill him for eavesdropping, but well – Bee doesn’t like knowing he’s been an asshole. He needs to know how to fix this, and he knows Prowl will never just answer the question. He doesn’t seem the type to accept apologies, either. So maybe this way he’ll figure something out.

Prowl stands just outside the back of the base, hidden where no one else would think to look, staring up at the sky. Jazz puts a hand on his shoulder. “Ya said it wasn’t home fer long.”

The tactician shakes his head. “No. I was adopted from there. My creators abandoned me to the Praxian enforcers. I was raised in a youth center until Optimus took me in.”

Bee almost stalls out at that piece of knowledge. It explains a lot about Prowl's drive. Jazz just nods. "But it was still home."

"It was. Even if I was – well, no matter what, it was the first home I ever knew."

Jazz casts Prowl a sharp look, but decides to drop that. "Mech," he says gently, "it's alrigh' ta grieve."

Prowl's doorwings are so low they're practically resting on his back, and his body trembles. "Stay with me?"

"O' course."

Bee turns his back, not wanting to watch. Eavesdropping is one thing, but this is private. He considers leaving – it doesn't look like he's going to get the answer he's looking for right now – but as he takes a step away, Prowl speaks again.

"Thank you."

"Fer what?"

"Actually trying to get to know me."

Jazz chuckles. "Trust meh, Ah think Ah'm gettin' more outta this than ya are."

Bee's optics widen, and a slow grin spreads across his face. With a whole new plan in mind, he walks away, confident in his leader's ability to get their tactician through this.

how crazy can ya be

Normally, Jazz does not worry about his mechs on the field. They can take care of themselves, and in any case, he has very little time for worry anyway. It's Prowl's job to worry, his job to follow Prowl's plan and get them in and out alive.

But this time Prowl is pinned down with them, snipers overhead and a minefield between them and safety, and all Jazz can think is how *Prowl shouldn't be there*. Magnus and Gunner both said he shouldn't, that he was needed in headquarters so he could plan. Prowl took one look at the mission and said he was going, and to hell with what they thought.

It's his first time running an op as a participant, and Jazz has to admit, the mech is good. He knows his limits, knows when to listen and when to take charge, and he sticks close to the others and learns from them. If this had ended any other way, Jazz was considering giving the mech the training to be more of an asset on missions like this, especially if he was going to just ignore the fact that tac officers usually stayed in HQ. Take down tac, you take out a team.

Then Shockwave found them, and everything went to hell in a handbasket.

Bee is shaking. He hasn't been on a mission that's failed this spectacularly yet. Thankfully, he's keeping silent and holding together, even if he does look on the verge of shutdown. Jazz glances at Prowl, watching the other mech as he stretches up just enough to get a lock on the snipers around them.

"There's 15 of them that I can see." he says quietly. "There has to be at least twice that, though."

Mirage chuckles darkly. "30. Well, don't we feel special."

"Th' *other* downside ta bein' too damned good." It's a poor excuse of a joke, but it makes Prowl smile nonetheless. Jazz takes a couple of shots just to keep everyone in the same position. "Got any miracle plans, Prowler?"

"That depends on how much you trust me."

Now *that* has Jazz's attention. During all the ops they've run together,

he has never heard Prowl say that. There's really only one answer he can give.

"With mah spark."

Prowl examines him a moment longer before nodding. He turns his focus back to the minefield. "The fastest route will be straight down the middle – we make the alley, we're in the clear."

Mirage recovers his voice first. "You want us to run through an active minefield with no cover."

"I want you to *follow me* through an active minefield with minimal cover." Prowl retorts. "I will provide us with what I can." He turns to Bee. "I want you to stick in between Jazz and Mirage. If anyone comes at us from the sides – shoot them." Bee nods. To Mirage, he adds, "Take up the rear. You'll need to provide cover fire in case it looks like they'll get a clear shot."

He glances at Jazz, but the visored mech just smiles. "Ah got yer back."

Prowl nods and pulls a second gun from his subspace. "On my mark." he whispers. The others take up position, and Prowl takes aim. Not in front of them – but to the sides.

And suddenly Jazz understands.

"Run!"

They take off through the field, and Prowl opens fire on the mines to either side of them. His aim isn't the best, and Jazz adds his own hail of bullets to the mix, detonating even more of the mines. Debris shoots into the air, masking their path. The Decepticons can't get a clear shot on them, and when it seems like they might, Mirage lights up the mines behind them.

How they make it across the field without detonating themselves is nothing short of a miracle.

Adrenaline pumping, they keep running through the twisted alleys until they make it to safety.

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Prowl fully anticipates the brig time. Turns out, Jazz didn't. He

follows Prowl down to the brig after they've been checked over by medical. Prowl glances at him. "I earned this, you know." he says quietly. "It's not like they're not being fair."

"Ya saved our asses." Jazz growls. "Agin. Piss-poor way ta repay ya, ain' it?"

"Well, I did disobey a direct order." He refuses to look at the Polyhexian. "Magnus and Gunner both ordered me to stay here."

Jazz stops cold. "Ya lied ta me."

Prowl flinches at that. He stops as well, but he refuses to look at Jazz. "Yes."

"Why?"

"To keep you out of trouble." Prowl's doorwings hang low on his shoulders, absolutely motionless. "I could not let you go alone. I knew I had to be there, and I knew if I told you everything, you would let me come regardless. So I lied."

Jazz can't quite wrap his processor around that. "What was so important that ya had ta be there?"

"10%."

"Huh?"

"That mission. The best I could do was 10%." Prowl's now looking at the ground, his doorwings trembling. "I told them it was suicide. Magnus insisted anyway. The opportunity was too good to pass up." His fists clench. "Even adding my own skills to the mix, our chances of success were only 12%."

Jazz can't breathe. His visor is so pale it's practically white. "So what, yer battle computer told ya the logical choice was ta kill yerself along with us?"

That actually earns him a small smile, but it fades quickly. "I don't use my battle computer. It's defective, so if it crashes, it'll take me down with it." Prowl shakes his helm. "Never liked the frelling thing anyway." He glances over at Jazz. The Polyhexian just stands there, staring at him. Prowl looks away. "If you can't trust me anymore, I'll understand."

“Can’t trust – “ Jazz’s voice chokes off, and he finally snaps out of his stupor. Instead of responding, he launches himself at Prowl, hugging the other mech tightly from behind, arms around his shoulders. Prowl makes a small sound of surprise, but his hands go up to hold Jazz’s wrists, keeping him in place.

The smaller mech fits perfectly between his wings, and his warm body makes Prowl almost sag against him. Jazz merely tightens his grip.

“Ya crazy fragger.” he murmurs. “Ah meant what Ah said. I trust ya wit mah spark, Prowler. That ya’d go agains’ *Magnus* of all mechs doesn’ change that. If anythin’, it makes meh trust ya more.” For just a moment, Prowl thinks he feels lips on the back of his neck, a sort of thank-you – just a light pressure, and then it’s gone. Jazz releases him, and Prowl finally turns around and faces him.

“Jazz – “

“Yer lookin’ out fer us the best ya know how, even at the expense of yerself. There’s gonna be consequences fer this. They’ll try ta take ya away from th’ team.”

Slowly, Prowl nods. “I know. They will say I’ve been compromised.”

“Ah won’ let ‘em. Ya know that, right?”

Prowl smiles then, an honest smile, and it lightens Jazz’s spark. “I know that, Jazzy.”

Jazzy. Jazz can’t help but grin at that. “Good. Now go sit in time out so we c’n git this done an’ over with.” He makes a show of shooing Prowl away, and the Praxian goes with a laugh, but as soon as he’s out of sight, Jazz’s smile drops away. His hands shake as he rubs them over his faceplates.

“Yer a crazy fragger, Prowl.” he whispers. “But Ah think – Ah think Ah’m just as compromised as ya are.”

conversations with dad

Prowl once again finds himself in front of Optimus Prime, but this time Optimus has come down personally to speak with him. It would make him laugh, if he wasn't clearly aware that his two months are almost up.

Optimus leans back in his chair, watching the two mechs on the far side of the conference room. Originally, he wanted to talk to Prowl alone, but Jazz insisted on being allowed to join the conversation. Prowl had merely shrugged and allowed him. So Prowl stands calmly in the middle of the room, looking at a point somewhere over Prime's head, and Jazz leans against the wall by the door, arms crossed over his chest. Optimus makes it a point to ignore him to the best of his abilities and keeps his focus on Prowl.

"What were you thinking?"

Prowl doesn't even flinch. "About what?"

"You walked through an active minefield, after completely disregarding orders to stay out of the field."

Now that gets a reaction. Prowl blinks. "How do you even know about that?"

"I saw the footage."

Prowl glances over at Jazz. "I was unaware we had kept that footage." Jazz just shrugs with a small grin. Prowl flicks his doorwings in an amused gesture before returning his attention to Optimus. "Regardless, the mission was a success. We got the intel required of us, and we made it out alive."

"Always a plus in mah book." Jazz murmurs. That earns him another amused flick. Optimus pinches his noseplates.

"That doesn't answer my question. Why did you disobey a direct order and go out into the field?"

Prowl's optics darken. "Because it was a suicide mission, and our chances of success increased with me on the ground with them."

"Then you should have taken your concerns to Magnus, or Gunner. Not taken things into your own hands. You ignored the chain of

command." It's a struggle to keep his voice calm when he really wants to shake Prowl right now.

To his surprise, Jazz speaks up. "He did. Prowl took his concerns ta Gunner an' ta Magnus, an' they sent us out anyway. Th' mission was 'too important'. So Prowl decided ta go with us." His voice is calm and collected, but his fists are clenched and tension is etched into every line of his body.

Jazz knows what's coming. Prowl does too. And Optimus knows, watching the two of them stand there, that they will fight his decision until the end.

He sighs. "Nevertheless, not only did Prowl disobey orders, he put himself and the team in severe danger by choosing that route. His two months are up. Therefore, I am changing his orders. He's to come back to Iacon with me and resume his intended role."

"No, he ain't." Jazz takes a step forward, taking up position by Prowl's side. "Ah'll tell ya what Ah told ya th' first time. Ya want mah team runnin' ops? Ya give us Prowl. Ah ain' doin' this without him. He's kept us alive."

"That's not your call to make." Optimus says quietly. His gaze flickers over to Prowl. "I'm going to discuss things with Magnus and Gunner, but if Magnus agrees with me, we're going to reassign you. Am I clear?"

Prowl's doorwings twitch again, but this time Optimus can read the anger and denial in his actions. For a moment, Optimus thinks that he's going to refuse. Instead, Prowl merely dips his helm.

"Crystal."

/---------/

In all honesty, Optimus fully expects Magnus and Gunner to agree with him. After all, Prowl's actions put the entire team at risk, not just himself. Optimus knows just how good Jazz's team is. In fact, there are rumors about the team that circulate through the Decepticon ranks. Intel usually gets a kick out of gathering those rumors. The Autobot cause cannot afford to lose them, no matter how much Optimus despises using them.

To his shock, Magnus agrees with him, but Gunner remains silent throughout the entire exchange.

When Magnus leaves to break the news to Jazz's team, Gunner catches Optimus before he can follow. "Might I have a word, Prime?"

"Of course." Optimus closes the door. "What can I do for you, Gunner?"

"You can take Jazz's team."

That – that is really not what Optimus was expecting. "You know how I feel about special ops." he says quietly. "That would not be for the best."

Gunner shakes his head. "It is what's for the best." he insists. "I told Magnus before Prowl was ever given the mission that this was suicide. I told him Prowl would back me up on that. 10% - that's what they went out there with. Magnus *knew that.*"

Optimus hesitates. He would never start a mission with such poor odds. "So why would he send his best team on a suicide run?"

"Because he's gotten used to the fact that Prowl can pull miracles out of his ass, and Jazz can execute them." Gunner growls. "He gets that team out of situations that really should kill them – he's been doing it from day one. Hell, that's why I pushed to get Prowl put on this team. But Magnus exploits that accordingly. Prowl doesn't like it, neither does Jazz, but we can't say anything about it. This is Ultra Magnus we're talking about."

"I cannot interfere with the way he runs his team."

"Even if it's going to kill your son? Or his?"

That startles Optimus. "How do you know – Magnus has a son?"

"Of course I know about Prowl – so does Jazz and I suspect the rest of the team as well." Gunner cuts him off. "And Jazz is Magnus' kid. Not that you can tell, with the way he treats him."

It takes Optimus a moment to digest that. Gunner pushes the point. "Tell me, would you force a team to go out on a mission that only had a 10% chance of success? Or would you listen to their tac officer and hold out for better circumstances?"

That earns Gunner a glare. "You know damn good and well what I would do." he grouses. "I can't just walk in and take the team away. This is a process."

“Then leave Prowl with us until you do.” Gunner says. “Jazz isn’t going to let him go. *I* don’t want to let him go, and Prowl doesn’t want to leave. So just leave him here for a while, think about it, and when you come back for Prowl – make sure you take the others with you.”

“I imagine I’ll be taking them with me regardless.” Optimus says dryly.

“You’d be correct.” Gunner walks past him and out the door. “I’ll send you the footage of Magnus trying to get Prowl to leave. That ought to be worth a laugh.”

He leaves Optimus standing in the meeting room, wondering just what on Cybertron he’s gotten himself into *this time*.

conversations with dad, pt 2

Prowl sits on his berth, watching with vast amounts of completely unconcealed amusement as Ultra Magnus tries to get Jazz to open the door to spec ops quarters. Bee sits next to him, grinning ear to ear while Jazz and Mirage flank the door. Jazz has a small smirk on his face; Mirage is struggling not to double over laughing.

There's actually another team in the quarters as well, the only one that Jazz's team works with on the occasional mission, watching the show and being of absolute no help to Magnus at all. The team leader, an Iacon femme called Sunbright, sits on Prowl's other side, leaning back on her hands and smiling at the entire scene.

"Jazz. Open the door, Jazz." Magnus sounds beyond exasperated, and Prowl is suddenly reminded of the tone Optimus would take with him when he was being exceptionally stubborn.

Jazz's smirk just gets wider. "Go away."

"Come on, we don't have time for this!"

Mirage snorts. Jazz just casts him a look. "Leave meh alone ta die."

"THIS STOPPED BEING FUNNY AT THE ACADEMY!"

Bee has lost the fight with laughter now. He's actually leaning on Prowl for support. "I'm surprised he hasn't tried to hack the lock yet." he chuckles. Prowl just smiles.

"That would be a very bad idea." he says. "I've seen some of the security Jazz added to that lock. No doubt Magnus knows that anyone that tries to hack the lock to this place is 90% certain to wind up with processor damage."

Bee winces. "Ouch. Jazz is mean."

"Jazz is ops." Prowl replies, and Bee has to nod in response to that. Being mean is part of being ops.

Jazz is still standing by the door, watching the exchange even as he addresses Magnus. "Ah told Prime, and Ah'll tell ya – Ah ain' goin' out without Prowl. So either we keep 'im, or yer down an ops team."

"That's not your call to make!" Magnus protests. "Prowl has his orders

_ “

“We gave at th’ office.” Jazz says flippantly.

“JAZZ!”

“Magnus.” Gunner’s quiet voice interrupts the tirade. If he listens carefully, Prowl can hear the sounds of Prime’s footsteps following Gunner down the hall. He stiffens.

A glance at Mirage, and Jazz abandons his post at the door to sit on the other side of Prowl, nudging Sunbright out of the way. He reaches out and grabs the other’s hand, and Prowl holds on tightly, the only sign of his nervousness. Jazz leans in against him. “They ain’ takin’ ya.” he whispers. Prowl just nods.

“Are you *kidding me*?!” Magnus’s shout echoes through the hall. “Prime, you can’t be serious!”

“Very much so. Come, let’s discuss this somewhere more private.”

The two bigger mechs walk away. Gunner waits until they’re well and truly gone before speaking to his rather shaken ops team. “You don’t have to worry about Prowl going anywhere.” he says. “I had words with Prime, and he saw the wisdom of keeping you guys together. You’ll probably be under more scrutiny, but that’s a small price to pay.”

“Not th’ first time, either.” Jazz replies. “Thanks, Gunner.”

“We owe you one.” Mirage adds, still standing by the door.

Gunner snorts. “Owe me one by keeping outta trouble for a while. Primus above.” His voice drifts away, still muttering good-naturedly about troublesome spec ops teams. Sunbright laughs at that.

“He’s always so full of hot air.” she says. “You guys are his favorite team.”

“We’re his best team.” Bee points out with a grin. “And it’s all because of Prowl.”

“Hey!” Jazz mock-protests. “Ah like ta think we were good fore he came in!” Sunbright laughs, and a few of the others start calling out good-natured insults. Jazz throws them right back, laughing the entire time.

Mirage watches the tense look on Prowl's face, and the way Jazz still hasn't let go of his hand, and a small smile crosses his face.

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To say Magnus is not pleased with Jazz would be an understatement. Jazz is just glad the other team is keeping Prowl busy right now. He doesn't need to see how nasty this is going to get.

"How did you manage to convince Optimus Prime to let us keep his tactician?" Magnus demands. He's not even bothering sitting down – instead, he paces across the room in front of his desk. Jazz just shrugs and leans against the wall.

"Mah awesome charm?"

"This is *serious*, Jazz! You know you're only allowed to serve under me if your team performs within certain standards!"

"An' what if Ah think that servin' under ya ain' in mah team's best interest anymore?"

That stops Magnus's rant rather effectively, as well as his pacing. "What are you talking about?"

"Ya use us, Magnus. Ya sent us out there ta die."

He snorts. "Clearly, that's not true. You completed your mission successfully. And this is hardly the first time I've sent you on a mission that's gone badly."

"Yeah, but th' other times Ah was startin' out with more than 10%."

Magnus stiffens. "Prowl told you. Damn it all."

"In his defense, Ah was rather pissed at him fer lyin' ta me about his orders."

Magnus shakes his helm. "Jazz. This isn't good, you know that, right? Prowl put your team in jeopardy. He disobeyed his orders and went against every ops protocol there is." He sighs and leans against his desk, arms crossed over his chassis. "He's compromised."

"If this is what he does compromised, Ah say let 'im be." Jazz replies flatly. "Ah like havin' th' best on mah team. Prowl is th' best. He's better than Firestar, better than anyone else ya could find. An' he actually likes ops. Most of the good ones don' like ops."

“He also walks in here thinking he can change everything.”

“Maybe some things need ta be changed.” Jazz fixes him with a hard stare. “What is this about, really? Ya never act like this.” Magnus doesn’t respond. Jazz grins. “What? Ya used ta havin’ free reign with ops, and now ya might have Prime breathin’ down yer neck. How long before he takes issue with the way ya run things?”

“I run things fine.”

“Yer ruthless, an’ that’s fine. Ya need ta be. But will Prime see it that way? More importantly – are ya bein’ *too ruthless*?”

“I’m as ruthless as I need to be, Jazz. I do what it takes to get the job done.”

“Apparently not, if Prowl and I c’n git jobs done without unnecessary risk.” Jazz pushes off of the wall and stalks over to the door. “Ah ain’ sayin’ nothin’ bad bout ya, Magnus. Ya got yer style, an’ it works fer ya. Just maybe it don’ work for us anymore.”

“And what – you think Optimus will have a better style? He can’t stand ops.”

Jazz hesitates. He knows Prime’s opinion on ops – honestly, it’s almost insulting, comparing his team to the Decepticons like that – and he knows Prime’s rocky relationship with Prowl. Still.

“It don’ matter. All Ah know is Prime will *listen* ta his mechs when they tell him it’s suicide ta go.”

With that, he walks out the door.

don't threaten me with a good time

It’s not often the ops teams make it out into the city. When it's Jazz's turn, he takes the entire team, and they head out to their favorite club. This particular club is frequented often by ops mechs, not that you can tell them from the regular civilians that come through the place. It’s safe enough, considering the femme that owns the club used to be ops herself, and she can smell a spy a kilometer away. She makes sure everyone that comes through can cut loose and enjoy themselves without worrying about someone trying to kill them or get information.

Well, the occasional fights do happen, but they're ops. It's part of the fun.

Prowl can honestly say he’s never been to a club. It’s nothing against clubs, he’s just never had the opportunity – or been invited, for that matter. So this excursion will be his first experience.

He’s not sure what he’s looking forward to most – experiencing the club himself, or watching the rest of the team just kick back and finally relax.

They stand outside the building, watching mechs and femmes come and go for a few minutes. Mirage grins as Bee hops excitedly from one foot to the other. “Well, mechs – are we gonna just stand around staring, or are we gonna have a good time?” he asks cheekily.

Jazz laughs. “Go on, mechs. Prowler an’ Ah will be righ’ behind ya.” Bee practically squeals in excitement and takes off into the crowd, Mirage hot on his heels. Prowl smiles to himself as he watches them go. Jazz glances back at him. “Never been in a club before?”

“No. This will be a first.” Prowl muses. He looks over at Jazz and smiles. “Shall we?”

Primus help him, but Jazz’s spark skips a little at that smile. He grins back. “O’ course! Let’s do this!” He links his arm through Prowl’s and guides him into the club.

It’s loud, dark, and Prowl immediately flinches at the sudden influx of input. He quickly tones down the data from his doorwings to something more tolerable. Jazz tightens his grip on his arm. “Ya alrigh’?”

“Yes. I just needed a moment to adjust.” Prowl flicks his doorwings in emphasis. "Too much input. It's good now."

“Good.” He flashes Prowl a wicked grin. “Come on, Prowler. Th’ fun is just beginnin’.” He guides Prowl through the crowd and to the bar. Mirage and Bee already have high-grade. Jazz orders them two more cubes and passes one to Prowl. For a while, the four of them just sit there, harassing each other and the bartender – a pretty femme who calls herself Glimmer – and drinking enough high-grade to rack up quite a bill. Prowl limits himself to three cubes, and he’s already approaching tipsy. The others have blown past tipsy but aren’t quite drunk yet. Just loose enough to have a good time.

Somehow Bee talks Glimmer into giving him a dance. While Mirage catcalls and generally does his best to embarrass the crap out of Bee, Jazz turns his attention to Prowl. His smile is in no way sober, and it makes Prowl smile in return. “Ah think Bee has the right idea.”

"You know I can't dance." Prowl points out.

Jazz leans in until he's a breath away from Prowl. "That's th' fun of it. Ya let meh lead, an' Ah'll teach ya how." He grins. "C'mon, Prowler - ya know ya wanna."

Prowl smirks. "Maybe, maybe not. But I will, and you know it." Jazz laughs and leans back again, taking Prowl by the hand and leading him out onto the dance floor.

The dancing is rather terrible, but Prowl has to admit - it's fun. Jazz is too tipsy to be much of a lead, and Prowl is just drunk enough to not care. Mirage somehow manages to find a dance partner in this mess of bodies. Jazz calls him Hound, and Prowl gets the impression that Mirage is close to him. He would make a note to ask about it later, but he wouldn't remember it anyway.

Prowl and Jazz take a break long before Bee and Mirage do. They find an out of the way table and take a seat, Prowl with his back to the wall and Jazz sitting to his left. Jazz watches as Prowl's doorwings lower just a hair. "All that input ain' good fer yer wings?" he asks.

"Oh, it's not that." Prowl assures him. "Too much input can cause pain, but this is bearable. It just takes a certain amount of concentration to keep the data input below normal."

"Oh." Jazz grins. "Too drunk to manage it?"

Prowl can't help but grin back. "Kind of."

Jazz snorts in laughter. Before he can make another retort, three mechs approach their table. One is Praxian, with the same build as Prowl but painted blue and green, and the other two are Iacon mechs, one predominantly grey, the other red. The Praxian sneers at Prowl.

"Lookit who it is, mechs. If it ain't the stick from the Academy."

Jazz bristles, but Prowl merely inclines his helm. "You'll have to forgive me, but I don't remember you." he says politely. Jazz casts him a quick glance. There's nothing in Prowl's body language to suggest he's intimidated or even worried by these jokers. "But I'm assuming we've met."

"Had a few classes together. You were always breaking the grading curve, but you couldn't interact with other mechs to save your life, could you? So, how the hell did an awkward *sparkling* of a mech like you manage to wind up on Magnus's team?" He raises his doorwings in what Jazz thinks is a threatening gesture. It's hard to tell, because Prowl is clearly not feeling all that threatened.

"Why would you care how I got where I am?"

The Praxian smirks. "Not willing to admit who you fragged? What's the matter – weren't good at it?"

Jazz stiffens again, but Prowl merely smirks. "Clearly better than you were, if I got on the team you wanted."

Ah, now *that* got their attention. The Praxian takes a step forward, fists clenching. "I'll make you regret that." he hisses.

Prowl leans back in his seat and smiles up at them. "You want to fight me?"

"Now he gets it!" the red one crows. "He may be sparkless, but at least he's kinda quick on the uptake!"

Prowl just continues to smile at them. There's nothing kind about his smile, but the other mechs don't seem to notice. "Three on one odds hardly seem fair, don't you agree?"

That's when two other mechs appear out of the crowd. Jazz tenses, but Prowl just smirks. "Oh, mech," he practically purrs, "don't threaten me with a good time."

The Praxian growls. "Get up!"

Prowl does, slowly stretching as he rises. Jazz stands as well, taking a step forward, but Prowl stops him with a raised hand. "I can handle this."

"Ya sure? Ah ain' above bustin' a few heads."

"I'm sure." Prowl flashes him a smile. Jazz just grins and takes a step back. By this time Mirage and Bee have made it over to the group. They circle around to stand on either side of Jazz.

"Boss?" Be murmurs.

"Not yet." Jazz replies.

The other Praxian gets tired of waiting. He charges Prowl with a hoarse battle cry.

In a move like lightning, Prowl grabs him by the throat and flips him over his shoulder, slamming the Praxian into the ground. The other mechs suddenly seem a lot less confident in themselves. Jazz laughs. "Impressive."

"Thank you."

The red mech takes a step forward. "You're not good enough to get all of us!"

Jazz steps forward, arms crossed over his chassis. "Ah wouldn'. Ya think Prowler's scary, trust meh - Ah'm worse."

"Oh, come on, Jazz." Mirage teases, never leaving his post. "We've been spoiling for a good fight. The Decepticons just don't provide enough of a challenge anymore."

That's enough to scare the other mech's. Red's optics pale in terror. Prowl smiles. "I would advise leaving now, before my team decides to work out their extra energy on you."

They leave. Wisely, Jazz thinks. Bee waits until they're gone, the unconscious Praxian supported between two of them, then busts out laughing. "Damn, Prowl, remind me to get lessons from you. I thought I was impressive!"

Prowl just laughs. Jazz wraps his arms around his shoulders, leaning against his back, and whispers in his audio. His voice is pitched low,

deliberately seductive. "Ah'm just glad yer on mah side."

"As long as you can keep me." Prowl teases. His voice is even, but he can't stop the shiver that tone sends down his spine. Jazz grins, his lips trailing lightly across the back of Prowl's neck before he lets go.

"Oh, Ah'll have ya for a *long* time." he murmurs.

Prowl just smiles to himself. "No argument there." he murmurs back. Louder, he adds, "Come on. We should probably find somewhere else to continue the night."

He can still feel the heat of Jazz’s body against his back.

face everything and rise

When Tyger Pax is attacked, Prowl honestly can't say he's surprised. After all, it's not as well defended as Iacon, and Ultra Magnus causes all sorts of problems for Megatron. In hindsight, Prowl can say they should have expected this. Of course, hindsight only gets you so far.

He's not with the rest of his team when the first of the bombs fall. Jazz is on patrol, Mirage is on vacation in Syph with Hound, and Bee is in the rec room playing a game with a handful of others. Prowl is in the training room. In fact, he's in the process of stepping out of the door when the entire room explodes behind him.

The first thing he becomes aware of is the screaming pain in his doorwings, and he can't shut off the sensors. Hissing in pain, he forces himself to his feet. He can hear other explosions as more bombs fall. Struggling to think through the pain, he attempts to make contact with his team. Nothing but static fills his audios. His comms are fried, and now he has no way of knowing what's going on in the base. He can't check in with his team, and that's the only thought he can hold in his mind past the pain.

Another explosion nearby convinces him to start moving. The hallway is getting hotter. He doesn't need to worry about Jazz or Mirage, with both of them being off-base. Bee has the focus of his thoughts. The last he checked, Bee was in the rec room, and the rec room is on the opposite side of the base.

Prowl makes his way there with a single-minded determination.

Chromia is organizing evacuation efforts. Prowl catches her attention easily enough. "What happened?"

"Far as we can tell, it's the Seekers." she says. They have to shout to hear each other over the roaring flames. "They're dropping bombs, but no one has come down to finish the job."

That's probably a small miracle. Prowl nods. "Have you seen Bumblebee?"

She shakes her helm. "No, but Prowl – the rec room is gone. It was the first area hit. If he was there, he's dead."

Prowl barely acknowledges that. He's aware of the odds. His team

destroys those odds on a regular basis. He simply nods to her and takes off down the hall, getting ever-closer to the rec room.

He shoves open the rec room door and finds himself in an inferno. Chromia was right – the rec room is simply gone, engulfed in flames, and for a moment Prowl can't breathe through the smoke and the scent of burning metal and energon. Still, he forces himself to call out.

"Bee!"

"Prowl!"

He's there, on the other side of the rec room, pinned beneath a crumbled table, somehow still alive. Not for long, though, if Prowl can't find a way to get to him. Parts of the ceiling are starting to fall. An attempt at rescue might mean suicide. Prowl can see Bee come to that same conclusion. From his position hiding by the tables, he waves at Prowl.

"Go! Get out of here!"

But Prowl sees it. A path, with almost 13% success at getting there. There's only a 10% chance of getting back out, less if the ceiling continues to fall.

They're ops. They beat worse odds than that on a regular basis.

Prowl takes off running, just as the ceiling begins to fall behind him.

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Jazz doesn't need the frantic comms of his base to tell him something has happened. He can see the flames and hear the explosions from six blocks away. He's already speeding back to base by the time Magnus recalls everyone.

Bee's comm is dead. So is Prowl's. Frantic, he pings Mirage.

::Ya heard from Bee or Prowl?::

::No. What's going on?::

::Th' base is under attack. Ah can't reach them.::

There's a brief pause. ::Hound and I are on the way.::

Jazz sends back acknowledgement. By the time Hound and Mirage

make it back to Tyger Pax from Syph, the fires will be out.

He skids to a halt in front of the base and transforms, visor flickering in shock. The base is almost gone, the entirety of it burning. Jazz just stands there, staring, and for a blessed moment he doesn't feel anything. Everything has gone numb.

There's no way they survived, if they're still in there.

"Jazz!" Gunner materializes behind him, placing hand on his shoulder to keep him stable. "I'm sorry, Jazz. Looks like Bee got caught in the rec room when the first of the bombs fell. Prowl went in there after him. The ceiling collapsed about 20 minutes ago. We haven't seen them since."

Jazz's knees buckle. Gunner catches him before he can fall on his ass.

"No." He finds his balance again, staring intently at the burning complex. "They're alive. They ain' gonna get taken down by some little pissant Seekers."

Gunner sighs, but he doesn't say anything in response to that. Jazz is grateful. He doesn't need to hear the odds. Prowl can give them to him down to the twelfth decimal place when Jazz finds him. But they *did survive*, because they're ops, and something like this isn't going to kill them.

So Jazz starts walking, searching the crowd of evacuated mechs and asking around. Surely someone has seen them. Surely someone knows where they are.

Gunner stays behind him and to his left, just inside Jazz's periphery, a small frown on his face as every inquiry is met with a negative answer.

Finally, they find a medic Jazz isn't familiar with in the last triage tent. They stop short. "Who're ya?"

"Ratchet, combat medic for Prime." The medic doesn't even bother to look at them, although the mechs around him are getting twitchy. No one wants to be around an ops mech when they snap, and only Gunner's presence is keeping some of the injured in the triage tent from completely flipping out. "Are you dying or in danger of dying?"

Jazz's visor flickers. "No."

“Then why are you bothering me? I have patients.”

“m lookin’ fer someone. Praxian called Prowl an’ a mini named Bee. Ya got ‘em here?”

Ratchet finally looks up from his patient to Jazz and Gunner. Suddenly, he groans. “You’re ops. Slag it all, why didn’t you say so from the beginning? Got a Praxian and a mini in the back, behind that sheet. Don’t know if it’s your mechs – never got designations.”

Jazz thinks his intakes might stop working. “Condition?”

“Bad enough, but they’re stabilized for now. Go check. Don’t disturb them.”

Jazz nods. “Thanks, Ratch.” He ignores the mech’s half-hearted protest about the nickname and heads into the back. Gunner follows him. Jazz barely acknowledges him. He simply walks to the back and shoves the sheet aside.

There are two berths set up. Bee lies on one, completely out, hooked up to an intake cleaner. Prowl is on the other, lying face-down, but he’s definitely awake. He’s watching the door with half-powered optics. Jazz immediately notices the doorwings, burned to slag and still red-hot in places, and he winces. “Slag, Prowler. Whaddya do?”

“I ran into an inferno.” Prowl murmurs. He offers Jazz a small smile. “I was hoping you would find us. Comms are down.”

“Ah know.” Jazz takes a seat next to him, completely disregarding Gunner for the moment. He’s barely aware of it when the mech leaves, confident now that the ops agent isn’t going to go postal at the loss of half his team. “Why ain’ ya rechargin’? Ah know ya in pain.”

Prowl shakes his head slightly. “Not really. Ratchet has me pretty drugged. Not feeling much of anything right now.”

“So recharge.”

“Can’t. Bee was put under for the intake cleaning.”

Jazz has to smile at that. “Taught ya well, didn’ Ah?” Prowl flashes him a smirk. Jazz nods. “All right, then. Ya rest now. Ah’ll watch out fer a while.”

“Okay.” Prowl’s optics offline, and for a moment Jazz thinks he’s

already gone. Then he speaks again. “He’s gonna fix my doorwings tomorrow. Make sure he doesn’t frag them up.”

Ops mechs are good at hearing what isn’t said, and Jazz can hear everything in those two sentences that Prowl isn’t coherent enough to say. He nods. “Ya got it, Prowler. Now rest.”

It doesn’t take long. Prowl’s too badly damaged to fight recharge forever. Jazz is shocked that he managed it this long. He falls so still that he looks dead, and Jazz reaches out instinctively and trails his fingers down Prowl’s face, seeking his warmth.

::Jazz ta Mirage.::

::Here.::

::Ah found ‘em. They’re alive.::

A brief pause. ::Thank Primus. We’ll be there as soon as we can.::

Bee’s out, Prowl is out, and Gunner is gone. Jazz is alone, and now he allows himself to shake. His optics burn with tears, but he doesn’t let them fall just yet. When Mirage takes over watch, Jazz will find a quiet place, and he’ll cry for the lives he almost lost.

For now, he stands vigil and watches over them.

this i promise you

Optimus watches Prowl and Bumblebee in the recovery room. After the Tyger Pax base was destroyed, all the injured mechs were moved to Iacon. Most of Magnus's normal team stayed in Tyger Pax to help rebuild and recover the dead.

Jazz came with his team.

Prowl is awake and getting used to his new doorwings. Bee leans against him, taking care not to touch the sensitive panels. Mirage and Hound, a tracker that gets loaned out more often than not, sit on an empty berth on the other side of the recovery room. Jazz has taken position beside Prowl, arms crossed over his chassis and an easy smile on his face.

Optimus is not fooled. He can see the tension lining that frame, the way Jazz's attention never seems to stay on anything for too long. Jazz is in combat mode, in unfamiliar territory with injured teammates, and he's probably even more dangerous because of it.

"So that's Jazz's team."

Optimus glances at Ratchet as the medic comes to stand beside him. He nods and returns his attention to the recovery room. Ratchet continues. "I've heard stories about them. Pretty sure they're the boogeymen of the Autobot army."

That earns him a sigh. "So they say."

"Yeah, whatever. You don't like special ops, we all know. Get over yourself."

And this is the reason Optimus keeps the cranky medic around. Not only is he phenomenal at his job, but he takes slag from no one, including Prime. It's nice to have someone who will tell him like it is. "Get over myself?" he asks mildly.

"Yeah. Get over yourself. Ops mechs aren't 'Cons in disguise, no matter what you might think. Scary bastards, but not 'Cons." Ratchet crosses his arms and turns his attention to the mechs, even as he continues to address Prime. "Your willful ignorance in this case is hurting that team."

“How so?”

“Gunner told me some of what Magnus is putting them through. Did you know Jazz has orders to return to Tyger Pax? There are ops to be run.”

Optimus stops cold. “He can’t. Half his team – his tac officer – is in that room. Everyone knows Jazz won’t work with another tac officer.”

Ratchet shrugs. “Hence why he’s here and not there. But that doesn’t change the fact that Magnus made the call.”

“And you think I would have done differently?”

“Your reaction tells me you would have. I know Gunner’s already raised the issue with you. When a spec ops leader asks you to take his best team off his hands, there’s a problem.” Ratchet shakes his helm. “His team is doing fine, medically speaking. Bee is recovered completely, and Prowl is right behind him.”

“They won’t leave an injured teammate unprotected.” Optimus murmurs.

“Pretty much.” Ratchet glances at Optimus. “You know how Prowl got that badly hurt?”

“I assumed it was the explosions.”

“That was part of it. The rest was having the rec room ceiling collapse on top of him when he went to pull Bee out. I got the story from him after I repaired his wings.” Ratchet flashes Prime a grin. “He also asked if I would consider being an ops medic. Something about only wanting the best on his team.”

Optimus can’t help it. He laughs. “Prowl has you pegged.”

Ratchet snickers. “I told him I would think about it. It’s flattering, though.”

“Nice to be so highly regarded.” Prime agrees. He studies the team for a moment before turning away. “I need a word with Magnus.”

“Finally getting your head out of your – “

“Don’t say it.” Optimus warns, but he’s laughing anyway. “I think I have the perfect reason now.” With that he walks off, finally ready to confront Magnus on this issue.

Ratchet waits until he's gone before leaving the area himself. He has other patients to see to, after all.

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The others fall into recharge long before Jazz and Prowl do. Prowl can't help but smile at the pile of limbs the other three mechs have made of themselves. Jazz nods towards Hound. "Ah'm glad he was able ta stay. We don' get ta keep him very often."

"Is he bonded to Mirage?"

"Ah think so. Hard ta tell. Ops don' exactly advertise, ya know?" Prowl nods, and Jazz continues. "But Ah know they love each other. This team is probably th' only ones that know."

"He's another one that's too good at what he does." Prowl observes. "That's why he doesn't get to stay with Mirage."

Jazz nods. "Best damn tracker Ah've ever seen."

They fall silent for a few minutes. Jazz can practically hear the wheels turning in Prowl's helm as he plots ways to keep Hound with the team. He hopes the Praxian succeeds. It would be nice to have the original team back together – the last three that are still alive, at any rate.

"You can recharge, you know." Prowl says abruptly, cutting off his darker thoughts. "I'm sure we're safe here."

Jazz scowls at that. "Yeah, that's what they told us about Tyger Pax."

He's fully expecting Prowl to argue the point, explain to him all the ways Iacon is safer. He's waiting to hear the odds of a Decepticon attack on the capitol city. Instead, Prowl surprises him yet again.

"At the very least, make Mirage or Hound take a shift."

That startles a laugh out of him. "Ah'll do that, Prowler."

Silence falls between them. Prowl is leaning against Jazz's side; Jazz has his arm around Prowl's waist, bracing him. For a moment, he thinks the Praxian has fallen into recharge.

Tears threaten to fall again, but he holds them back.

"You can let go." Prowl whispers. "I was scared, too."

It's all the permission Jazz needs. He turns to hide his face in the crook of Prowl's neck, unwilling to expose his tears, but they fall on Prowl's shoulder. Prowl makes no move to comfort him, instead simply allowing him to cling and cry silent tears. A few tears escape from Prowl as well, and he does nothing to hide them. They're both safe with each other. Their fear will not be used against them.

The tears finally dry up, but Jazz doesn't move. He simply sits there, face still hidden, visor shut off, still allowing Prowl to brace his weight against him. He feels Prowl shift enough to wipe his own face before the Praxian speaks.

"I don't think Primus would let us in if we died like that."

It's just a dumb enough statement to make Jazz snort. Prowl chuckles at the sound, and that's enough to set Jazz off. Soon both of them are cackling, quietly enough not to wake the others, but laughing still.

It feels *good* to laugh like this again. Jazz can't remember the last time.

He leans back and grins at Prowl. "Yeah, bein' killed by air raid is a piss-poor way ta go." he teases.

"I don't know – the burning ceiling did make it oddly reminiscent of certain minefields." Prowl shoots back with a grin. Jazz shoves him good-naturedly.

"Shaddup." He abruptly turns serious. "Ah promise ya, Prowler – Ah'm gonna protect ya. Ya protect mah team, so Ah'm gonna protect ya. Ah swear."

Prowl just nods. "I know, Jazzy."

times always change

“I’m surprised you’ve come to collect your team personally.” Optimus muses, walking alongside Ultra Magnus as they make their way to the recovery ward. Gunner trails behind them, listening in on the conversation with ill-disguised interest. Magnus nods curtly.

“I have to deal with Jazz.” Magnus practically growls. “He disobeyed his orders to return immediately. Looks like Prowl is rubbing off on him. He was never so insubordinate before. I was hoping Prowl was more by-the-book than he is.”

“I thought insubordination was the mark of a good ops mech.” comes the mild response. Magnus snarls something under his breath, but Optimus ignores that. It doesn’t sound complimentary, anyway. “Actually, this works out quite well. There is an issue with Jazz’s team that I wish to discuss with you.”

“Primus.” Magnus mutters. “What have they done now?”

“Nothing they have done.” Optimus replies. “Rather, what I wish to do.”

“Take Prowl off my hands?”

“I’ll take them all off your hands.”

Magnus stops dead in his tracks. They’re standing just outside the recovery room now, and Optimus suspects that Jazz and Prowl are listening in. Gunner is now not even attempting to hide his interest. A small smile is starting to form on his old faceplates. Optimus merely inclines his helm to the old soldier.

“You hate ops.”

“I have been informed by quite a few mechs that my dislike of ops is unfounded and rather damaging. I would like to use Jazz’s team to learn more about them and the uses they serve.”

Magnus snorts. “Don’t bother trying to pretty it up. You want them because you know Prowl won’t stay otherwise.”

Optimus shrugs. “I’ll admit to a certain amount of personal gain. The rest of it involves the team itself. I don’t like the way you use them and disregard them.”

“You’ve never even ran an op before. Trust me, there’s a slight difference between what actually goes on and the reports you receive. Besides, they’re ops, Prime. They sign up to be *used and disregarded*.” Magnus retorts. “You know the average lifespan of an ops mech? It doesn’t pay to get attached.”

Those words hit Optimus like a punch to the gut. He just stares at Magnus for a moment before he can find his voice. “Even if one of those mechs is your son?” he asks quietly.

Magnus shutters his optics and tilts his helm back. “Some mechs need to learn to keep their damn mouths *shut*.” he growls.

Gunner snorts. “Have you forgotten that I’m not just head of ops? Prime likes that I don’t keep him in the dark. Kinda like this, actually – hey, Prime. If you’re gonna take the team, you need to take all the team. It includes Hound.”

Optimus blinks. “I’ve never seen mission reports involving Hound.”

“That’s because Magnus here doesn’t believe in keeping bonded mechs together. Something about becoming a liability to each other, although I fail to see how Hound is a liability to Mirage. Kinda like why every request Chromia has put in to join your team has never made it past him.”

There’s a long pause while Optimus considers that. Magnus looks like he’s ready to up and murder Gunner, but the old ops mech completely disregards him as a threat. Instead of saying anything that Optimus could have, he simply turns his full attention to Gunner.

“Please inform Chromia and Ironhide that her transfer has been accepted.” he says quietly.

“You don’t need another communications officer.” Magnus snaps.

Gunner snorts. “Please. Her talents are being wasted on comms. Just because she’s decent at it doesn’t mean that’s where she needs to be. Her talent lies with close combat.”

“And Jazz hasn’t attempted to recruit her?” Optimus asks with no small amount of amusement.

Gunner grins. “He has. She has all the subtlety of a thrown brick. Prowl’s started using her for the shock-and-awe factor alone.”

“Well, that’s what I use Ironhide for.”

That earns Prime a laugh. “I’ll go let her know. She’ll be happy to be staying here.” With that he turns and leaves. Magnus turns the full force of his irritation on Optimus.

“Prime – “

“No. They’re staying here. You can either walk in with me and tell them the news yourself, or you can leave right now. But you’re not taking them back with you to Tyger Pax.” Optimus goes to open the door, then stops. “You should know that it was Gunner who originally approached me about taking the team. To quote Ratchet – when the head of ops is asking you to take his best team, that should tell you something about the way it’s being run. For now, I’m unwilling to look too hard into it – I’ve always given you your freedom and you give me the results the army needs. Don’t push your luck on that.”

Magnus glares at him, but after a moment he decides against whatever was going through his processor. He turns on his heel and stalks away instead.

Prime decides not to worry too much about him. If he decides to try anything, Gunner will alert him to the danger.

He slides the door open to the recovery room. Turns out only Jazz is awake. Surprisingly enough, Prowl is recharging with his helm in Jazz’s lap, his doorwings fluttering occasionally. Bumblebee, Mirage, and Hound are curled up in a mech pile on the other berth. Jazz levels him with an even gaze.

“So, yer gonna take us on.”

His quiet tone doesn’t seem to wake the others, and Optimus modulates his own tone accordingly. “I am. Hound, too.”

Jazz almost scowls at that. “They never wanted anyone ta know.”

Prime can read between the lines. “Then as far as they base is concerned, they are simply teammates. What I have learned will not leave me.” He considers for a moment, then adds, “Well, Ratchet as well. He needs to know for medical reasons. Bonded mechs react differently.”

“True that.” Jazz glances down at Prowl, one hand resting on his shoulder. For a brief moment, Optimus wonders if Mirage and Hound

are the only bonded mechs in this team. “And Prowl? If we’re all on yer team, what does that mean fer him?”

“He stays with you.” Jazz’s helm snaps up, visor meeting Prime’s gaze, and Prime shrugs. “You won’t accept another tac officer. You’ve made that abundantly clear. Similarly, Prowl will not accept another team. He stays with you.”

Tension Prime hadn’t noticed drains from Jazz’s frame. “Thanks, Prime.”

“Don’t thank me yet. I’m not the only one on this team with a dislike of ops. You’ll have to prove yourselves a lot to the mechs here.”

Jazz just smiles, a faint quirk of his lips. “We ain’ worried ‘bout fittin’ in. Didn’ on Tyger Pax, and we won’ here. As long as we got each other, we cool.”

Optimus nods. “Tomorrow I’ll get Ironhide to show you around. For tonight, no one will brave Ratchet’s wrath just to see the new mechs. Get some rest. It’s safe here.”

It’s an unknowing echo of Prowl’s words, and Jazz almost breaks. He almost screams at Prime, shouts at him all the different ways a base can be attacked, infiltrated, even bombed out of existence. Prowl shifts in his lap, and that small movement is enough to distract him from his mounting frustration. Instead of snapping, he forces a small smile.

“Ah’ll try.”

“Good.” With a small nod, Prime leaves. Jazz glances down at Prowl, who is quiet once again, but no longer faking recharge. Dark blue optics lock with his.

“Things will get better.” Prowl murmurs.

Jazz looks away. “At least wit Magnus Ah knew where we stood.” he replies. “Ah don’ anymore.”

Prowl offers a smile. “Lucky for you, I do.”

The Polyhex mech takes the gentle tease for what it is. He can’t stop a smile of his own as his hand comes up to trail down Prowl’s faceplates. “An’ where is that, anyway?”

“No more being loaned out. No more suicide missions just because we stand a better chance of not dying.” Prowl catches his hand before he can pull away. “No more threat of separation. Optimus will listen to us when we tell him something is too dangerous. Things will get better, Jazz. I promise you.”

Jazz sighs and squeezes the hand that holds his. “Ah hope yer right.”

Prowl squeezes back. “I know I am. Rest, Jazz. I’ll take watch.”

From outside, Prime listens in on the exchange with a bittersweet smile.

At least his son still has some faith in him.

new neighbors

Ironhide watches as the new team makes themselves at home in Iacon.

For the life of him, he can't figure it out. Optimus doesn't like ops. That's really not a secret. So, what's so special about this team that he's willing to go against what he believes and have them join the ranks? After all, it's not like ops mechs can stop being ops.

It's not that Ironhide doesn't trust them. He doesn't have quite the same hang-up his leader does, and besides, he's heard enough about this team from Chromia to like them already. He can thank Gunner for Chromia's transfer to Prime's team.

Still, he watches the group. Or rather, he watches the leaders of the group. They're the ones he needs to watch out for. They'll tell him how the rest will behave.

So he watches Jazz and Prowl.

From what he's gathered, its Jazz's team, technically. But the others listen just as much to Prowl as they do to Jazz, maybe a little more, since even Jazz tends to defer to Prowl during missions. Ironhide stands just outside of the office that the team inherited, watching as Jazz and Prowl investigate and find it severely lacking.

Jazz crosses his arms over his chassis and scowls. "Ah don' like it. There's only one way in. Anyone tries ta corner ya, this is th' place ta do it."

Prowl nods absently, his focus on something else entirely. He stares up at the ceiling and the vent right above the desk. Jazz follows his gaze. "Think ya c'n get in there?"

"Only one way to find out." Prowl hoists himself up onto the desk and removes the grate covering the vent. Jazz stands just beside the desk, watching him intently. He has one hand up near Prowl's shin, ready to brace him if it looks like he's going to lose his balance. Prowl pushes himself up to peer into the vent, then shakes his helm. "I can get up, but that's about it. The vent narrows in both directions. Bee couldn't even get through there."

Jazz frowns. "What about a cassette?"

“Maybe, if they’re determined. Make a hell of a lot of noise, though. Frenzy’s the only one small enough that I know of, and we all know he can’t keep his vocalizer shut.”

That makes the Polyhexian snort. “Ah’ll have Raj seal it shut.” Jazz backs up as Prowl jumps off the desk. Together, the two of them shove the desk to the far side of the room – away from the vent and anyone who might use it to spy, Ironhide realizes. Jazz leans against the relocated desk and look around. Prowl begins pacing the room, like he’s memorizing the number of steps to each wall, and it makes Jazz smile.

“Almost enough room ta dace in.” he teases.

Prowl flashes him a grin. “Is that a challenge or an offer?”

“An offer, if ya treat meh right.”

“I think I can manage that.” Prowl walks over and reaches out, taking Jazz’s hand. “Probably not today, though. I think we might break Ironhide if he saw the way we ‘dance’.” Jazz laughs, the sound a little deeper than his normal chuckles, and he takes Prowl’s hand and allows himself to be pulled to his feet. Prowl smiles at him, a real smile, not the little smirks that Ironhide has seen in the past few days.

“So – where to now, Prowler?”

“I thought maybe we could help Mirage settle the room. Help him run a security check.”

Jazz shakes his helm. “We don’ got a room yet. Prime’s got us all split up now that we’re outta Ratchet’s wires.”

Prowl’s smile falls from his face. “Teach me not to check the list.” he mutters. “Who’s with who?”

“Hound and Raj, Bee’s wit Cliffjumper, Ah’m wit Blaster, and yer wit Smokescreen.” Jazz is almost pouting by the time he finishes his list. “Ah don’ know any of them, and Ah don’ trust ‘em either. Especially not Smokescreen.”

Prowl nods to himself as he considers this. “I suppose it makes sense. Cliffjumper is a mini like Bee, and Smokescreen is another Praxian.”

“Ah don’ care. Ah still don’ trust ‘em.”

From his position by the door (clearly they know he's watching them), Ironhide decides to speak up. "Smokey and Blaster are fine. Jumper can be a bit of an ass, but once you get used to him, he's a pretty good mech."

Jazz casts his glare towards Ironhide. "So ya say."

"You think I'd lie to you?"

"Ah think ya ain' lookin' at things like an ops mech." comes the expected retort. "There's a difference between bein' a good mech an' bein' able ta protect yer teammate."

Ironhide could take offense to that, but Chromia did warn him that Jazz is almost insanely protective of his team. Prowl almost equally so. So instead of going off on Jazz, Ironhide decides to go a different route. "No one rooms with their teams like that. We learn to depend on more than just one or two other mechs. However, if you're gonna be anal about it, you can always try to clear out one of the storage rooms. They might be big enough."

Prowl examines him for a moment, the intensity of the look making Ironhide almost squirm. The tac officer's optics have changed to a dark blue, and that unnerves Ironhide even more. He's gotta give the rumors a little bit of credit – Prowl can be a damn scary mech when he puts his mind to it.

"Of course we're going to be anal about it, Ironhide." he says quietly. "When you're in ops, you learn not everyone is who they claim to be. You limit who you trust to who you can verify."

"So that means you don't trust any of us?"

"Ya said it, not us." Jazz points out with a wry grin. "C'mon, Prowler – let's go find that storage closet."

"I imagine Mirage is already on it." But Prowl allows Jazz to link their arms together and walk out of the office.

Ironhide stands there for a moment, debating the merits of following. Then he hears Chromia call after the two and knows she'll fill him in when he asks her later.

He leans against the wall and shutters his optics, groaning. A chuckle draws his attention.

“I take it you’ve met our new additions.”

That just makes him groan more. “Jumper. What a pleasure.”

Cliffjumper leans against the wall across from Ironhide and glares at the floor. “I hate this. I’ve never had a roommate before, and now they stick me with an ops mech.” He practically spits out the word. “Cons, the whole dirty lot of them.”

“Jumper, you think *everyone* is a Con.”

“I’m positive that Jazz is. Probably Mirage and Hound as well, but definitely Jazz. I haven’t figured out Prowl and Bumblebee yet.”

Ironhide groans again. “And I’m sure when you do, you’ll decide they’re Cons as well.”

“Maybe.” Jumper pushes off the wall and stretches. “Well, I guess I need to go make sure my new *roommate* feels welcome and fuzzy inside.” He waves at Ironhide and walks away. Ironhide just watches him go.

Until things get settled, until this team gets comfortable with their new surroundings, this is going to suck so hard.

What was Optimus thinking?

the soldier he became

Chapter Notes

> Just to let you know how much I appreciate ya'll's reviews and kudos, here's the next chapter a bit earlier than anticipated. You guys miss Blue?

It comes as a surprise to absolutely no one that the team is not well received in Iacon.

Part of it is Prime's attitude. For the longest time, spec ops were kept at arm's length, known about but never discussed, and that's the way the entirety of the Iacon base is used to things being done. Now there's a team on base, completely flying the face of what Prime has held close for so long, and it makes mechs suspicious. There's rumors going around as to why this team, the best ops team that the Autobots have, ranging from blackmail to secret family relationships.

The rest of it has a lot to do with Cliffjumper.

He's not shy about speaking his suspicions of the team, even though he does like Bumblebee, however grudgingly. Some of the other minis are picking up on his viewpoints.

Then there's Bluestreak.

It takes the youngling almost a week to realize the team is on base. The next day, Prowl and Jazz find themselves accosted by an excited Bluestreak on their way to get energon.

"Prowl!" The tac officer turns just enough to catch Bluestreak's hug from the side instead of the back. The youngling is still a full head and shoulders shorter than him, not quite in his adult frame yet. Prowl staggers back a step, and Jazz automatically reaches out to steady him.

The entirety of the rec room holds its breath as Prowl blinks down at his new attachment, recognition slowly dawning in his optics.

"Bluestreak?"

The youngling beams up at him. "Yeah! You remember me! I'm so glad you're here – I thought I was never gonna see you again!"

“I was not aware you stayed with Prime’s team.” Prowl murmurs.

“Yeah – Optimus thought it would be best, considering how few Praxians there are left. Kinda noticeable, you know?” He pauses only long enough for Prowl to nod before directing his attention to Jazz. “I’m sorry, I don’t know you. I’m Bluestreak.” He reaches out and shakes Jazz’s hand.

“’m Jazz. Ah’m Prowl’s team leader.”

Bluestreak’s optics brighten with excitement. “Oh wow! I was hoping I’d get the chance to meet you one day! If you hadn’t brought your team out there, Prowl never would have found me!” He lets go of Prowl and latches on to Jazz. The Polyhexian stiffens considerably.

Prowl watches the exchange with amusement. “You have no clue what to do, do you?”

“Not at all.” Jazz almost whines. “Help meh, Prowler.”

“Hug him back. Pat him on the helm, tell him you’re glad to officially meet him.” Prowl’s exceedingly dry tone elicits laughter out of those mechs close enough to hear it. Jazz glares at him, but he follows Prowl’s instructions. Bluestreak lets go with a bright laugh.

“Don’t worry, I won’t hug you every time I see you – I just really wanted to do that because I know you guys are the only reason I’m alive and – “

“Breathe, Blue.” Ironhide warns gently. Bluestreak chuckles and nods. Ironhide continues, not even bothering to stand from his seat. “He’s a good kid – knows when to be quiet, but once he gets going, sometimes he forgets to shut up and let someone else talk.”

“He probably shouldn’t be talking to them.” Cliffjumper says from the other side of the rec room. “There’s no telling what he’ll accidentally let slip.”

That shuts everyone up. The tension is almost palpable as Bluestreak turns to face him. “What are you implying?” he snaps.

Cliffjumper meets his gaze evenly. “That maybe Jazz’s team is the reason Praxus no longer exists.”

The reaction is instantaneous. Jazz snarls and reaches for his phaser. Prowl takes a step back out of the line of fire. Bluestreak manages to

beat Jazz to the punch.

He throws his empty energon cube and whacks Cliffjumper upside the helm with it. From all the way across the rec room. A distance of at least 200 meters.

“You shut up! Prowl’s the one who dug me out – you don’t know what you’re talking about!”

For a second, no one moves. Jazz blinks. “Tha’s a damn good shot, Blue.”

And just like that, the anger and tension are gone. Bluestreak grins up at Jazz. “Thanks! I’m in training to be a sharpshooter.”

“Yer gonna be great at it. Yer a natural.”

Bluestreak beams happily at them. “Thanks! Maybe when I’m done with my training I’ll be able to join your team.”

Prowl and Jazz exchange looks. Prowl looks mildly amused; Jazz just looks panicked. Ironhide decides to make the situation more awkward. After all, this is funny. “It’s all he’s been talking about since he recovered. You’d break his spark if you said no.”

Prowl just laughs. “If I had something, I’d throw it at you.” He puts his hand on Bluestreak’s shoulder. “We’ll talk about it closer to time, okay? But don’t limit yourself to just ops. Your talents may be better used elsewhere.”

Bluestreak nods. “Okay. Well, I need to get to comms – Smokescreen is going on patrol. See you guys later!” With that, he darts off.

Jazz stares after him in shock. “Ah wasn’ expectin’ that.”

“Neither was I.” Prowl turns back to the dispenser and retrieves two cubes. He hands one to Jazz. “It is good to know he’s doing alright.”

Jazz snorts, but the pair start to walk away. “Righ’. Like ya haven’ bee monitorin’ him through his records.” he teases gently. Prowl just laughs, but Ironhide notices he doesn’t deny it.

Ops mechs are paranoid fraggers.

Cliffjumper watches them go. “They’re gonna kill him. If they think they need to.”

“Cliffjumper.” The deep voice startles everyone – even Jumper snaps to attention. Optimus stands just behind him, fixing him with a dark look. “I would advise you keep your opinions to yourself. It is your right to have them, but it is not your right to endanger innocent mechs by voicing them.”

Jumper lifts his chin. “There’s nothing *innocent* about them.”

Prime merely inclines his helm. “There is until proven otherwise.” With that, the Autobot leader leaves the room.

Ironhide just returns his attention to his energon. Beside him, Chromia scowls. “I don’t get those two.” she mutters. “They’re good mechs. Why can’t they see that?”

“Prime’s a little too naïve for his own good.” Ironhide comments dryly. “And Jumper’s a jackass.” He glances at her. “Keep an eye on them.”

“You think Jumper can do anything to an ops team?”

“I think that team can do plenty to him, if they think they need to.” he retorts. “Just keep watch. Please.”

She mock salutes him. “You got it, boss.”

That earns her a gentle shove.

Things calm down after that, but Ironhide doesn’t miss the dark glare that stays on Jumper’s features.

murphy's law

Ops has a series of rules that are largely unspoken but understood by all who are or work with ops. The most pertinent of those rules is one that Jazz actually coined, but every ops team understands and follows.

If you have enough missions that go smoothly, the next one to go to hell will do so in the most spectacular way possible. It's like the universe is making up for all the times the team got away scott-free.

It's not often the ops team runs co-missions with the rest of the army. This time, though, the army is a diversion to allow Jazz's team to penetrate the Decepticon stronghold closest to Iacon – and consequently the greatest threat.

This is the first real op they've run under Prime's control. Optimus can tell they're nervous – hell, he's nervous. This is his first op as well, and he prays to Primus above that he doesn't frag this up. Jazz, Mirage, Hound, and Bee are out in the field. Prowl is at HQ coordinating with Smokescreen to keep everything coherent. It's taken hours of careful maneuvering to get the team into position and not tip off the 'Cons. As far as Prime knows, the Decepticons aren't aware of Iacon's new addition to the army. Prime and Magnus agreed it was best not to advertise. The other ops teams have been instructed to keep silent on the matter. This should be easy enough.

Still, Prowl is *scared*. Optimus can see it in his black optics and laser-like focus. The moment of truth is at hand, and Prowl's doorwings are as stiff as the rest of him.

"Bluestreak, do you have a visual?" Smokescreen asks, battle computer humming.

"Affirmative."

There's a little hitch to the sniper's voice, and Prime is forcibly reminded that this is Blue's moment of truth as well. The young Praxian insisted on being allowed to participate, but now Optimus wonders at the wisdom of letting him go.

Too late now.

"Hold your position. Do not fire until I give the order." Smokescreen is calm and collected despite the tension, everything Optimus could ask

of a mech being groomed to be his TO. The older Praxian glances at Prowl. “Send the team in. Once they breach, we’ll start the attack.”

Prowl barely acknowledges him. “Hound, sit-rep.”

“Just give the order, Prowl!”

“Got a sentry out here, about five clicks north of our position.” Hound reports. *“He hasn’t spotted us.”*

Smokescreen is starting to lose his patience. “Are we done being paranoid? Give the damn order.”

Prowl ignores him, just like he’s been doing for the majority of the mission. “Bluestreak, is anyone within the engagement zone?”

“Just the first wave.” It doesn’t escape Prime’s notice that Bluestreak seems much calmer when dealing with Prowl.

Smokescreen growls under his breath. “Jazz, take the team in. Do it now.”

The response is immediate and completely expected. *“Sorry, mech – Ah take mah orders from Prowl.”* There’s a general murmur of assent from the other ops mechs, and Smokescreen utters a wordless snarl.

Optimus takes a step forward. “Prowl – “

Suddenly, it clicks. Whatever has been bothering Prowl about this entire mission finally solidifies, and he swears. “Shit! Jazz, fall back – you’ve been made. First wave, fall back! It’s an ambush!”

Optimus cuts across him. “Soldiers, hold your positions. Prowl, explain this.”

“Frag ya, Prime.” All traces of Jazz’s usual good humor are gone, and their tracers show them abandoning their posts. *“Prowl says git out, Ah’m gittin’ out. Ironhide, git the front wave out.”*

“Jazz, I said hold your position!”

But Prowl isn’t even attempting to explain. He’s gone into full ops mode, ignoring what’s a hindrance and focusing on what can help his team. “Blue, can you get a lock on that sentry Hound scented?”

“Got him.”

“Mech or drone?”

“Drone.”

“Frag it all.” Prowl swears. “Jazz, keep falling back. Hound, keep look out for drones approaching from the east. They’ll be trying to cut you off from the rest. Blue, take out that drone, now!”

“No, Blue!” Smokescreen snaps. “You shoot, the whole plan goes to hell.”

“It already has!” Prowl is shouting now, staring at his screen with bright, vacant optics, as if willing the young sniper to make the connections he has. “Blue, if you don’t shoot, the team dies!”

“Sorry, Smokey.” Blue says quietly. *“Prowl’s team, Prowl’s call.”*

He takes the shot.

On the ground, chaos erupts. The drone drops, and thousands pop up from their hiding places, cutting off the first wave’s retreat. The drones surround Jazz’s team, effectively isolating them from the rest of the army.

In HQ, Prowl goes mobile. He takes only a moment to establish comms with Jazz, then he’s out the door and down the hall before Prime can call him back. In a flash, Blaster is beside him. Prowl raises an optic ridge in question. Blaster shrugs.

“What? I’m handy in a fight.”

In the end, Prowl and Blaster are joined by Chromia and Arcee, one of the other femmes stationed at Iacon. The four of them hitch a ride with Skyfire, who’s bringing reinforcements to the first wave, and he drops them right into the middle of the fight.

The four surround the ops team, taking over the fight for a few precious seconds. That’s all the team needs to catch their breath. Jazz falls in beside Prowl and flashes him a wild grin.

“Hell of a party, ain’ it?”

Prowl returns the grin. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

/-------/

They win the fight, in the sense that they come home from it.

There are too many injuries, too many fatalities, for Optimus to be comfortable calling this a victory. The original objective failed – drones run colder than mechs, with no spark signatures and virtually no scents, and consequently they were missed by everyone's scans – but at least they mostly made it back. They didn't lose any ground to the 'Cons, but they didn't gain any, either. Another draw.

Any dark thoughts Optimus may have entertained about the fight are immediately shoved from his mind as he watches the uninjured walk into the rec room. Smokescreen's voice catches everyone's attention.

"What were you thinking, Blue!"

Bluestreak just stares up at him, fists clenched but trembling, as a very angry Smokescreen bears down on him. He's fighting the urge to run, Prime knows, and he has to admire the youngling for it. An angry Smokescreen is a scary Smokescreen.

"Prowl gave the order."

"I don't give a shit what Prowl said! You aren't ops – you follow my orders! You could have gotten them all killed!" He reaches out and shoves the youngling back a few paces. Optimus steps forward, ready to diffuse the situation –

And suddenly Prowl is *there*, standing between Smokey and Blue, stained energon sword held to Smokey's throat. His optics burn black, and his doorwings are raised high in clear threat. It doesn't take long for the rest of the team to join him, forming a living wall around Blue.

None of them escaped the battle unscathed. It makes for an extremely intimidating statement.

"Touch him again, and I will gut you."

Prowl's voice lacks all emotion, just as cold as his expression, and Smokey falls back. "You –"

He never gets the chance to finish what he wants to say. Prowl strikes him across the face with the butt of his sword. "Your orders almost killed my family. And now you want to take out your inadequacies on our youngling. Do yourself a favor – *frag off."*

Jazz just grins. "Damn, that's hot."

Hound laughs. "Nice to know that hasn't changed since I've been

away."

Just like that, the tension is cut. The group – now including Bluestreak – make their way out of the rec room and to Ratchet's medbay. Optimus watches them go.

Jazz stops just beside Prime for a brief moment, but long enough to deliver his own message.

"When we say that Prowl is scary good, we ain' just chattin' him up." he bites out. "Ya might wanna remember tha' next time."

And then they're gone, leaving a stunned Autobot army in their wake.

a matter of trust

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over the months of rooming with Jazz, Blaster has learned a great many things about the ops mech.

Most importantly, he's a paranoid fragger. Blaster learned pretty quick not to move from his berth once Jazz went into recharge. It doesn't take much to wake him, and in the beginning, it took him a moment to realize where he was and who was in his room. That moment was usually long enough for Blaster to wind up with an energon dagger at his throat.

Blaster might take that personally if Jazz didn't wake up every time *anything* changed in the room – even when others of his team drop by. The door opens, Blaster gets up, someone knocks, and Jazz is awake.

After the fight (Blaster hesitates to call it a battle) and after Ratchet has everyone patched up, the injured are allowed to return to their quarters if they can. Jazz and Blaster are capable of returning to theirs. It doesn't take long for Jazz to pass out cold on his berth, face down. Blaster just settles on his berth and starts to read.

Twenty minutes later, the door opens, and Prowl steps in. Blaster tilts his helm in question, but Prowl merely shakes his helm and walks over to Jazz's berth. He watches his sleeping teammate for a moment before gently pushing him towards the edge of the berth and curling up beside him. Jazz shifts a little into the new source of warmth, but otherwise doesn't react.

And Blaster can only stare in awe. Prowl offers him a two-finger wave before falling into recharge himself.

Huh. Well, that's odd.

Even odder is watching Jazz wake up the next morning. He wakes maybe five minutes before Prowl does, right after Blaster decides to get up, and he just stares at the armful of Prowl he finds himself with. Blaster grins.

"I didn't think you could recharge through anything."

“When the frag did he get here?”

“Maybe 20 minutes after you crashed.” Blaster heads into the washroom. “Ratchet wants us all in for checkups.”

“Of course he does.” Prowl grumbles. He stretches a little and smiles up at Jazz. “Problems?”

“Why ain’ ya in yer quarters?” Neither mech has made a move to extract themselves from their rather compromising position. In fact, Blaster muses, both seem to be exceedingly comfortable right where they are.

“Smokescreen changed the code. I wasn’t in the mood to hack the lock.”

Jazz’s visor flashes. Blaster watches from the washroom door, keeping completely still. He’s seen that look before – usually right before all hell breaks loose around the mech. “He did what now?”

Prowl just gives him a look. “Are you really surprised? It’s not like we got along before I overrode his orders.”

“Ya really think Ah’m gonna let that slide?”

“Considering that your pranks usually involve explosions and a lot of death, I was hoping you would.” comes the mild response. Jazz snarls something under his breath. Prowl merely continues, his voice much quieter. “We cannot afford to retaliate in any way – at least not obviously. You know that. Our position is precarious as it is.”

“Don’ mean Ah gotta like it.” Jazz sighs. For a brief moment, he rests his helm against Prowl’s shoulder. His entire frame seems to shudder. “Damn it all. Tha’ was too close last night.”

“Not the worst close call we’ve ever had.” Prowl reminds him, cupping the back of his helm in a comforting gesture. Jazz snorts.

“True enough.” He starts to get up, but Prowl tightens his grip just a little bit. Jazz settles back down, looking at his partner with a curious expression. “Prowler?”

“It will get better. He will learn how to use us properly.”

Jazz’s lip curls in a sneer. “He’s a sparklin’ tha’s been given a hand grenade.”

“A nuke would be a more accurate description.” Prowl meets his sneer with an even expression. “But he will learn. Optimus is not one to repeat mistakes. This will get better.”

For a long moment, Jazz just stares at him. Finally, he sighs. “Ya know, Ah hate it when ya use that tone. Ah’ll always believe ya when ya use it.”

That makes Prowl smile just a little. “How so?” he asks, but Jazz just shakes his helm.

Do exactly as I say, and I will get you out of this alive.

How is he supposed to explain something like that? That tone is something he will always associate with that first encounter, the way he just instinctively knew that he could trust this Prowl, no matter what. So he just smiles at Prowl as he gets up and watches Prowl do the same.

“No reason. Just hafta.”

“Ah. Then for the sake of my sanity, I won’t question it further.”

“Prowler!” Jazz laughs and gives him a shove. Together the two leave the quarters and head to the communal washroom. For some reason, Jazz only cleans up when he has his team with him.

Blaster can only stand there and watch, completely baffled.

Looks like Prowl is the exception to one of Jazz’s rules, at least.

/-------/

As the week marches on, Blaster watches Prowl and Jazz.

Turns out Prowl is the exception to most of Jazz’s rules. He’s the only mech that can get away with walking directly behind Jazz, leaning against him at random times, and even attempting to sneak up on him. The way they fight in the training room, heckle each other as they walk, the non-existent personal space that exists with everyone else *but them* –

Well, honestly, Blaster isn’t really surprised that most mechs think they’re bonded.

If Prowl and Jazz are aware of the rumors, they don’t show it. Nor do they allow the stares and the whispers to affect the way they behave

around each other. Blaster has already known exactly how protective of the team Prowl is – he was there when Prowl almost gutted Smokey, after all – but it turns out Jazz is just as protective of them. Especially Prowl. It shows in the way he stays even closer than normal whenever a threat comes near.

So, Blaster has to wonder. Just how close are Jazz and Prowl that they can get past all of each other's barriers?

He doubts he'll find out anytime soon.

Chapter End Notes

> People keep asking me for fluff. Does this qualify? I think it's about as close as this story gets.

a semblance of acceptance

The week following the battle, Gunner shows up in Iacon, at Prime's request.

Honestly, he's not sure what he's expecting. He reviewed the file on the battle on the way over, and quite frankly, he's livid. Any sparkling would know not to involve the regular army in ops matters. It was only Prowl's quick thinking and Bluestreak's quick compliance that kept any more mechs from dying.

So, he shows up with the full intention of chewing Prime out. Instead, as he enters the rec room in search of the leader, he finds his team set up in their own corner. With a small frown, he stops and watches them.

Ops have never mixed well with the regular army, but never has it been more clear than it is here. There's Prowl, Jazz, Mirage, Hound, and Bee all huddled together, talking and laughing and generally looking comfortable with themselves. But Jazz keeps scanning the rec room, looking especially in the direction of a group of minis. On the other side of them is Ironhide and Chromia, at their own table but still engaging the group. As Gunner watches, two more mechs – he thinks Blaster and Bluestreak – join the ops team.

Huh. Might as well stop by and say hi before he proceeds to Prime's office.

He doesn't get very close before Jazz spots him. "Gunner! Ah'm glad ta see ya – Ah've had ta be diplomatic!" Jazz wails, putting on his best pathetic display. Mirage rolls his optics.

"Yes, he's been so put upon. Can you tell?"

Jazz glares at him. "If yer tone was any drier, ya'd give th' desert a run fer its money." he grumbles. "Ah hate bein' diplomatic. Gunner c'n do it now."

Gunner has to reset his optics. "Whose bright idea was it to make Jazz the people person here?"

"Apparently, Prowl can no longer be trusted." Hound laughs. Prowl merely flicks his doorwings in a shrug. Jazz snorts.

“Yeah, cuz the last time Ah let ‘im do it, he nearly gutted Smokey.”

“In my defense, Gunner, Smokescreen had it coming.” Prowl says easily. Bluestreak snickers. Prowl smirks at him before turning his full attention to Gunner. “What brings you to Iacon?”

“Optimus did.” Gunner sighs. “Apparently, our Prime doesn’t know how to handle an ops team. So, he brought me in for some training himself.” Prowl and Jazz exchange looks, but Gunner dismisses it. He knows how those two operate. Instead, he turns his attention to the two new mechs who have joined the group. “You two must be Bluestreak and Blaster, right? How did you guys get this close to the team?”

Blaster grins. “We don’t have quarters large enough for an entire team. So, I wound up being Jazz’s roommate. You have a paranoid fragger for a second, you know that?”

Gunner laughs. “Kid, you’re not telling me anything I haven’t figured out a long time ago.” he teases. Blaster just laughs. Gunner looks over at Bluestreak. “And you? How did you get in on this?”

“I’m the Praxus survivor.” Bluestreak says simply. “Prowl’s the one who rescued me.”

“And the rest of us just sort of adopted him.” Mirage adds, tone dry. “He’s got a hell of an aim.”

Gunner nods. “From what I gathered, you went against Smokescreen’s orders. How did he handle that?”

Jazz snorts. “Poorly. Tha’s why Prowler here tried ta gut him.”

“I wouldn’t have actually gutted him.” Prowl protests lightly. “That’s not where I was aiming.”

“Nah, ya would have decapitated ‘im then.” Jazz snips. “An’ now yer roomin’ wit me an’ Blaster.”

Blaster grins. “You say that like I should care. At least when he’s around you freak out a little less.” he teases. Jazz’s visor flickers.

“Ah freak out at all?”

Mirage snorts. “Well, Blaster said it – you’re a paranoid fragger.” he points out. “However, you do tend to freak out less if it’s Prowl. Like

when he leaves the quarters to go sparring at night."

Jazz has to pause a moment to digest that. "Huh. Ah never noticed."

"We did." Mirage, Bee, and Hound all say simultaneously.

Gunner chuckles. "Well, I need to go see Prime. I'll be around for a while, though." With that, he gets up and leaves.

/-------/

It's not common knowledge that the head of ops is also Prime's TIC. Although Gunner has always been more involved in his ops duties than any duty towards Prime, he still retains the position, even if it is in name only. Which means he has the right to bust Prime down like he's a sparkling.

"I don't think I need to tell you how stupid you are."

"No, I'm aware." Prime leans back in his chair and sighs. "So, tell me something – when I agreed to take on Jazz's team, what exactly did I get? I'm familiar enough with ops, but not with them."

Gunner sighs. "There are a total of 20 teams under my command. Out of all of them, Jazz's team is the one with the highest success ratio. They're also the ones with the most unconventional methods. Jazz likes taking the rulebook and burning it. So unfortunately, the only way to really prepare you for the nuclear device you just inherited is to make you work with it for a while."

"Hopefully with you sticking around?"

"Of course. I'm surprised you didn't ask me that to begin with." Gunner hesitates. "How is the team relating to the other soldiers?"

"Not well at all. I'm afraid my own prejudices haven't helped matters. And then there's Cliffjumper."

"Minibot?"

"Yep. Thinks the whole team is a bunch of 'Cons. From what I gathered, he tried to pin the destruction of Praxus on Jazz and the team."

"And he lives?"

"Well, he said this in front of Bluestreak, Prowl, and Jazz. Ironhide

told me Blue got to him first. Knocked him in the helm with an energon cube." There's a hint of pride in Prime's voice. "There's a few that get along with them well enough. Chromia, Ironhide, Ratchet, Bluestreak, and Blaster. I might have added Smokescreen to that list, but not anymore."

Gunner nods, considering. "What are Bluestreak and Blaster's specialties?"

"Sniping and communications, in that order." Optimus arches an optic ridge at the slow smile that spreads across Gunner's face. "Need I remind you that Blue is still a youngling, and Blaster has never shown an inclination towards ops at all?"

"I'm not saying I wanna make them permanent members of the team." Gunner protests, but he never loses that smile. "I'm just thinking that's a handy piece of information to have. It's nice to have allies in the normal forces."

"I second that." Optimus leans back. "Now, I'm going to need everything you have on Jazz's team. Mission reports, disciplinary actions, everything. If I'm going to use them properly, I need to know what I have at my disposal."

Gunner inclines his helm. "Of course."

introducing a little anarchy

Chapter Notes

You guys ready to meet the Twins?

Two days after Gunner arrives, the Twins return from Kaon.

Sunstreaker and Sideswipe have a reputation in Iacon. They're troublemakers, Sideswipe an eternal prankster, Sunstreaker a violent brawler, and they always have each other's backs. Everyone knows to screw with one is to screw with both of them, and everyone knows the Twins have taken a shine to Bluestreak.

In all honesty, no one is really surprised. When Blue first arrived on base, he wasn't afraid of the Twins. In fact, he sought out their company more often than not, simply because they were scary bastards. They were scarier than his nightmares, but they were on his side, and that's all he needed to feel safe. The Twins, not quite used to being seen as scary good instead of just scary, took Blue under their wing.

When they get back to Iacon, the first thing they hear about is the new ops team, and the way Blue has taken a shine to them. Time to gather some information.

They decide to start with Prowl.

Finding the Praxian is easy enough. He's in the training room, watching as Ironhide puts Blue and a few others through some close-combat training. They come up behind him, relying on the noise the trainees are making to cover their steps, but Prowl's voice stops them cold.

"You must be the twins everyone is talking about." He glances over his shoulder at them. "I was wondering how long it would take for you to come find me."

The Twins exchange looks. "You knew we'd come specifically for you?" Sunstreaker asks.

Prowl's wings flick in a dismissive gesture. "Tac is generally considered weak and easy to exploit. If you didn't come to me first, I'd be worried about how you survived this long." He turns his attention

fully to them. “What can I help you with?”

Sideswipe decides to change tactics. Prowl doesn’t seem to be intimidated by them in the least. “I’m Sideswipe. This is my brother, Sunstreaker. And we hear your team has taken a shine to our little Praxian friend, Blue.”

“And we would really like to know why.” Sunny says, picking up where his twin left off. “After all, there’s not many that tolerate Blue very well. They say he talks too much.”

“Hm, so I’ve heard.” Prowl fixes them with a piercing stare. “I could ask the same thing about you. What does a pair of frontliners have in common with a youngling who’s being trained to be a sniper? Especially one who has already made it plain he wants to be in ops?”

The Twins exchange looks again. Before either can say anything, Blue notices their presence. “Sunny, Sides, you’re back!” Suddenly he’s trying to hug both of them at the same time. Sides laughs and hugs him back. Sunny just smiles, but it’s clear he enjoys the attention.

Comprehension flashes in Prowl’s optics, but it’s gone by the time Blue realizes he’s standing there as well. “Wow, this is awesome. You guys already met Prowl! He’s the one who rescued me from Praxus – and his whole team is here, too! Isn’t that great? I thought I was never gonna see them again, but then they came here.”

Sunny’s gaze snaps up to Prowl. “You couldn’t just say that to begin with?”

Prowl smirks. “Where’s the fun in that? I thought you wanted a challenge.” He tilts his helm to the side, then sighs. “Gunner calls. I’ll see you later tonight, Blue.” Blue nods happily, and Prowl leaves the training room.

Sunny and Sides exchange looks. “Okay, Blue – looks like it’s up to you to fill us in on what’s happened since we left.”

Blue nods. “Of course. Let’s go get some energon – I’m done for the day.”

/----/

Optimus and Gunner watch the army from the observation deck. The rec room technically has two levels – the lower level where everyone eats and plays and generally cuts loose, and a balcony that runs all the

way around the rec room. This is usually where the higher-ups watch the troops, both to keep an eye out for possible problems and just because it's fun watching the games the others play. This time it's a little bit of both.

"Looks like Prowl has caught the Twins' interest." Optimus says with a chuckle. "I'm not surprised."

Gunner frowns. "Sunstreaker and Sideswipe? I guess that means they're back from Kaon then."

"Yes. Their mission took longer than I was hoping."

"You sure they just didn't take their time about it? They do love the gladiator pits."

Optimus chuckles. "It's a possibility." he allows. "But as much as they love fighting, they love Bluestreak more."

Gunner arches an optic ridge. "Love? They're a little young for that."

"True enough, but that doesn't mean anything to them. Time will tell how long that'll last. For now, it's not like they're planning on bonding anytime soon, and that's all that counts." Gunner nods, and Optimus continues. "It'll be interesting to see how they take to the ops team. They're rather possessive of Blue."

Gunner snorts. "Yeah, that won't end well. If Prowl doesn't flatten them, Jazz will."

"I wasn't aware Prowl had received combat training." Optimus says. "Last I checked, tac never goes into the field. All Prowl has had is basic self-defense from the Academy."

"Tac never does, but Prowl does when the occasion calls for it." Gunner retorts. "How do you think he wound up out there during the minefield incident?"

"I was hoping that was a one-time thing." Prime admits. "Then he took off during that last mission."

"He doesn't like his team being out there and him unable to help." Gunner says flatly. "It's not something we can train out of him or forbid him to do. He's already proven that."

"True." Prime sighs. "The only thing we can do is give him the

training to survive it."

"I really don't think he needs it. I've seen him fight with Jazz and Mirage during training – he can hold his own. Trust me, those two don't hold back." The two return their attention to the rec room. Jazz now has the Twins' attention. From up here, they can't hear what's being said, but suddenly the Twins turn their gaze to Smokescreen. Sideswipe nods. Jazz grins. The three shake hands, and the Twins vanish from the room while Jazz returns to the team. Gunner blinks. "What just happened?"

"I think we just witnessed the initiation of a prank war." Optimus says dryly. "Primus help Smokescreen. The Twins do not play nice."

"Huh. So that's how Jazz plans to get him back."

"I'm surprised he's not taking care of it himself. Smokey did kick Prowl out, after all."

"Yeah, but Jazz's pranks tend to involve massive amounts of collateral damage."

For a moment, Optimus is silent. "I never thought I'd say this, but I definitely prefer the Twins' pranks."

Gunner bursts out laughing.

iacon prank wars

Chapter Notes

> I'll give you guys the same warning I gave the FF.net crew - I suck at coming up with pranks. So this chapter is less prank-city and more character development with the pranks just being mentioned. I hope you're not too disappointed.

Ratchet can honestly say that an all-out prank siege is a really odd way to get to know someone. Then again, he's known the Twins for as long as they've been Autobots, and they've never done things the normal way.

Like Bluestreak, the Twins came to the Autobots as younglings, not too much older than Bluestreak is now, an abusive past leaving them with severe trust issues that Ratchet figured they would never get over. As far as Ratchet can tell, he's the only one besides Blue who simply isn't afraid of the Twins. As a result, they spend as much time around him as they can.

They're practically his sparklings, for all the care he's put into them.

And now they're pranking the hell out of Smokescreen at the behest of Jazz, and all for the approval of Prowl and Bluestreak.

Strange mechs, the lot of them.

Prowl's complete lack of fear of the Twins has caught their attention. In fact, the Praxian seems downright comfortable around them, not minding when they decide to watch op training, or stalk the tac room (as Prowl's office has become known as) listening in on plan outlines. While Optimus learns how to use his new team properly, said team has decided to use that time to outline thousands of plans based on all the various ways a mission can go wrong. Sometimes Prowl pulls the Twins into those plans.

As the Twins get closer to the ops team, their prank campaign against Smokescreen just gets more intense.

Poor Smokey has no clue what he's done wrong. Ratchet almost finds it funny.

Optimus walks in on the aftermath of one of the more unusual pranks.

Ratchet is giving Smokescreen a new paint job – and how the Twins managed to paint him *sparkly neon pink* is beyond Prime, they normally don't involve glitter in their pranks like that – and Smokescreen is complaining bitterly about the whole thing.

"I just don't get it." he tells Ratchet. Neither of them have noticed Prime yet. "The Twins haven't been back long enough for me to have pissed them off! What the hell gives?"

Ratchet pauses in his task long enough to smack Smokey in the back of the helm. "I thought tac was supposed to be smart." he snips. "Who have the Twins fallen in with since they've gotten back?"

Smokey glares at him. "I'm not stupid, Ratchet. I know they've taken a shine to ops."

"Apparently, you're stupid enough. Who on ops have you pissed off recently?"

The tac officer stills. Ratchet nods. "There's your answer."

"But the Twins never prank at the request of someone else."

"Maybe it started off that way. And maybe now they're *friends* with Prowl, and they're getting revenge for their *friend*."

It doesn't look like that sits well with Smokescreen. Honestly, it doesn't still well with Prime. The Twins have always been a major wild card in the Autobot army. No one has ever known exactly where their loyalties lie, and as a consequence, it would surprise no one for them to turn 'Con. Ratchet is the only one that seems to have a handle on them, and if anyone asks, he starts throwing things at them.

Now they're becoming integrated rather nicely with the ops team, which for most of the base, is another wild card. Prime doesn't really know how he feels about that. He's not surprised, though.

"I didn't think ops made friends." Smokey's voice interrupts his thoughts.

Ratchet snorts. "Yeah, and you and Prime would be the only ones to think that way." he mutters darkly. "If you would *think* instead of letting your own damn prejudices blind you, you would realize that they've been making friends from the beginning. Ironhide, Chromia, Bluestreak, Blaster – *me*." The emphasis on that last one is hard to miss. It's also a clear threat, and it shuts Smokey up for the moment.

Prime calmly backs away, the other mechs never knowing he was there.

Seems like Ratchet has a better handle on everything than he does.

/-------/

He finds the team and the Twins in the training room. Everyone else has cleared out, letting the team have their fun. Even Gunner is in there, watching and making sure they haven't lost their edge while Optimus finishes up his own training.

Right now, Prowl is sparring with the Twins. Both of them.

And he's winning.

Jazz materializes beside him, watching the fight with a smug smile on his faceplates. "Ya look like yer gonna catch flies." he comments. "Can't be that shockin', watchin' him fight."

Optimus shakes his helm. "I never knew he had an interest in fighting." he admits, his voice fainter than he would have liked. "At least, not like this."

"Fer all the love he has of ops, an' ya never knew he wanted ta fight?"

They watch as Prowl nimbly dodges Sunny's attack, making him stumble into his brother. The two crash to the ground. Sunny starts swearing. Sides just laughs. Prowl smirks. "Stop advertising! I can see what you're planning before you even have the chance to do it."

Optimus sighs. "No. I hate to admit it, but I know very little about my own son."

Jazz returns his attention to the sparring match. Prime glances over at him. He can see it, even past the visor – the warmth that Jazz seems to hold specifically for Prowl. Slowly, the ops mech smirks.

"Well, yer gonna start learnin'." Without glancing at Prime, he adds, "Ya got a reason fer comin' down here?"

"I think you can call off your Twins." Prime says dryly. "Ratchet finally beat some understanding into Smokey's helm. And possibly mine as well." Jazz chuckles.

"We'll see 'bout that." He takes a step forward, then pauses. "Prime – Ah hate ta say it, but it's abou' damn time."

Optimus chuckles as Jazz joins Gunner, calling out advice to the Twins as they struggle to get the upper hand on Prowl. He simply leans against the wall, watching silently as the team continues to train the Twins. Slowly, a small, real smile curves his lips.

“Yes, I suppose it is.”

get up!

Chapter Notes

> For maximum effect, listen to the song Get Up by the band All Good Things while you read this chapter. Let the angsting begin!

When it happens, it's not even an op.

The ops teams very rarely fight in actual battles. They're too valuable. Nothing can happen to the teams that make the army's victories possible. However, this is one of those fights that have involved everyone. Even Ratchet has abandoned the safety of the base and is out in the melee, the Twins protecting him as he treats everyone he can.

Jazz's team has joined the fight as well, keeping the area around Ratchet as clear as they can. Ratchet keeps a sharp optic out on his surroundings even as he's elbows-deep in a soldier's internals. The ops team and the Twins have formed an impenetrable wall around him, evidenced by the bloody blades and pile of bodies slowly building up around them.

There will be no saving those mechs taken down by ops. They're dead before they hit the ground.

Even Optimus is watching the fight out of the corner of his optic as he fights alongside his soldiers. Prowl and Jazz move as one mech, backs to each other even as they move like lightning. Prowl's twin swords drip with shed energon. Jazz's dagger flashes as he cuts throats and shreds armor.

Still, even with Optimus and Ratchet looking out, with the others of the team distracted with their own battles, no one sees the mech quite literally drop out of the sky on top of Prowl and Jazz. One of the Seekers must have given him a lift. The three of them tumble away from the rest, swearing up a storm, and suddenly two sounds rise above the rest of the battle.

Prowl's cry of pain, and Jazz's infuriated scream.

Prime doesn't even hear the shot that takes down the unknown Decepticon. Bluestreak has found the perfect position, and no one will ever see him until he wants to be seen. He can't see anything beyond

the mass of mechs he's fighting, can't stop and make sure his son is okay like he wants to.

Bluestreak, however, can see everything through his scope. He can see the torn doorwing, the lacerated metal hanging from the sensitive panel, and the bloody gash across the left side of the Praxian's helm.

"Prowl!" Jazz barely has the time to spare him a glance. The mech slowly pulls his knees up under him, raising himself to a kneeling position. His arms shake with the effort. Energon drips from his helm, from his doorwing. The shock of multiple systems failing threatens to send him into lockdown. Everything is muffled on his left side, and fading quickly. Sensor echoes.

He can barely hear Jazz's voice.

"Prowl, get up!" Mirage's voice, to his right, clearer than Jazz's and sharper. Mirage and Jazz have left the circle around Ratchet, leaving the medic's protection to the Twins, Hound, and Bee. There's too many Decepticons. Prowl is going to have to stand on his own.

If he can find his balance.

From either side of the trembling mech, Jazz and Mirage exchange looks. Mirage nods, determination turning his optics to ice. Jazz flashes him a vicious smile.

This mech saved their lives. They're going to save his.

"Prowl, ya gotta get up!" Jazz screams, turning his focus back to the battle. "We'll git ya some time, but ya gotta get up!"

The pain is blinding. The loss of energon is threatening to send him into shock. He can barely find his balance.

He has to get up, or he's going to die. Jazz and Mirage can't fend off this many 'Cons indefinitely.

Slowly, he pushes himself into a crouch.

Jazz is hyper aware of Prowl's movements. He knows this has to end, soon. Prowl can barely stand, and there's only so long he and Mirage will be able to protect him.

Bee's voice cuts across his rising panic. "Jazz, behind you!"

Neither Jazz nor Mirage get the chance to react. Prowl's good

doorwing twitches, and he twists around just enough to lunge forward and shove one of his swords into the 'Con's chassis. The mech folds over and dies without making a sound. Prowl flashes Jazz a weak grin.

"I'm not totally helpless. Good to know."

Jazz can't help but laugh at that.

Slowly, the battle is starting to pull apart. Jazz and Mirage close rank around Prowl, joined quickly by Bee and Hound. There's the sound of gunfire behind them, and Jazz glances back to see Blaster joining their tight circle. Prowl stays where he is, in a trembling crouch, breathing turning ragged with every passing moment.

He's always been a target, and now he's an easy one. Even as the Decepticons pull back, there's a brave few who try to get past the ops mechs to take out Prowl. Those who aren't cut down by the ops team find themselves dropped by Bluestreak's bullets.

Ratchet doesn't need the frantic calls of the ops team to tell him what to do. As soon as the battle clears around them, he makes a beeline straight for them.

Prowl reaches up and touches the injured area. His hand shakes. Slowly, he looks up at Jazz. The mech's visor is almost white.

"Prowler."

"I'm sorry, Jazz."

With that, the entire world goes black. Prowl falls to the ground, completely out.

Jazz screams, his entire frame trembling. This time, there are no tears. There's simply fear and pure, unbridled *rage*, and all he can do is scream as Ratchet kneels beside Prowl and takes in the damage.

"Jazz!" Suddenly Mirage is in his face, pushing him back and away from the carnage. "Jazz, he's still alive! Listen to me – he's still alive! It's gonna be okay. I promise you, it's going to be okay."

There's more, meaningless babble as far as Jazz is concerned. Still, his processor manages to lock on to part of what Mirage is saying.

Prowl is alive. It's enough to let him get control of himself.

Ratchet doesn't even act surprised by the outburst. He simply looks at

Jazz with knowing optics as he says “Let’s get him back to the base.”

/---------/

The entire ops team is crowded outside of the med bay. Ratchet meets them at the door, unwilling to let them in and equally unwilling to leave his injured unattended. He’s not even surprised to see not just the team, but Optimus, Ironhide, the Twins, Bluestreak, and Blaster all waiting for news on the tac officer. Still, he keeps his focus on Jazz.

The ops leader is trembling, fury and fear fighting for dominance across his faceplates. Ratchet hopes his next words will calm him. “He’s stable.” The sudden release of tension is almost palpable, and the medic holds up a hand to stop the celebration. “He’s not out of the woods just yet. I don’t anticipate him dying by any stretch, but he did take severe damage to his helm and doorwing.”

“How bad is it?” Optimus asks quietly.

Ratchet pauses, unsure how the team will take the news. “The ‘Con knew what he was doing. The blow to his doorwing was just a distraction. His real target was Prowl’s helm – his battle computer.” He returns his focus to Jazz. “It’s destroyed. The knife didn’t just cut it – it ripped the thing out of his head. Tore out his left audio, too. The audio I can fix, and I will before he wakes up. The battle computer is a lost cause, and I’m leery about installing a new one while he’s out.”

To his surprise, Mirage chuckles. “Yeah, I wouldn’t do that without asking him, first. He’s very, ah, *picky* about that thing.”

Jazz speaks for the first time since they got back to the base. “But he’ll live?”

Ratchet nods. “Yeah, Jazz. He’s gonna live. That I can promise you.”

Mirage quickly grabs Jazz’s arm, steadying him as the relief nearly takes him to the ground. “Thank Primus.” he whispers. Mirage echoes the sentiment. Ratchet nods.

“That’s a word for it. He got lucky that’s all the damage he suffered, that I can see, at any rate.” He sighs. “Go to bed, all of you. I’ll let you know when he wakes up.”

Jazz opens his mouth to protest, but Mirage tugs on his arm. “Thanks, Ratchet.” Mirage says, guiding Jazz away.

Ratchet simply nods to Prime and goes back inside the med bay. Optimus sighs and follows his soldiers away from his son.

Yes, thank Primus, indeed.

consequences of our actions

When Prowl wakes up, he's in the medbay of the Iacon base. He can tell almost immediately that he's not alone – Jazz is to his right, holding his hand tightly. Mirage is on his left. Slowly, he onlines his optics. Jazz is watching him, visor dim. Mirage is talking to Ratchet. It takes Prowl a moment to focus on him, and in that moment, Jazz's visor brightens.

"Yer awake."

His voice is quiet, but it draws Mirage's attention, which in turn draws Ratchet's. Prowl merely smiles at Jazz.

"If it's not a minefield, I'm not dying because of it." His voice is rough and almost painful to hear, but Jazz's grip on his hand tightens, and he laughs. Prowl's smile grows wider. "I'm assuming something happened to my audio? I can barely hear Mirage."

"How much do ya remember?"

"Some of it. I had to have been hurt pretty badly for you to still be hovering like this." He attempts to sit up, but Jazz and Mirage both stop him. The vertigo hits a second later. "Something definitely happened to my audio."

"It was torn out." Ratchet says bluntly, coming to stand at the end of the berth. "Along with your battle computer."

Prowl has to reset his optics. "My battle computer?"

"Yeah. I'm surprised you didn't notice it right away. I've replaced your audio, although I'm keeping the input down until your internal repairs fix the wiring. Your balance will be affected until then. I would have replaced the battle computer, too, but Jazz and Mirage suggested I wait until you were awake and ask you." Ratchet crosses his arms over his chassis. "So what is it that I need to know?"

Prowl doesn't respond immediately. He considers the situation, keenly aware that Jazz has not let go of his hand yet. Something is wrong – the Polyhexian is *shaking,* although it's only his proximity that allows Prowl to notice. He needs to get through Ratchet before he can get Jazz alone and figure out the real problem here.

“That explains the vertigo.” he says finally. “As for the battle computer, leave it out.”

Ratchet shutters his optics and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Prowl, this is no time for saving face. Your team needs you to have that computer. You all rely on it.”

Prowl merely looks at him. “How badly would it terrify you to know that I never turn it on?”

There’s a full 30 seconds of silence while Ratchet processes that. “Excuse me?”

“When it was installed in the Academy, something went wrong. The thing crashes every time I boot it up – and when it does, it takes me with it. After two or three tries, I simply stopped attempting it.” Prowl shrugs. “I don’t see how that’s so hard to understand.”

“You’re telling me that everything you have done since joining Jazz’s team has been entirely without the aid of a battle computer.” Ratchet considers him for a moment. “Terrify doesn’t even *begin* to describe what that does to me.”

“Hence why I don’t tell anyone.” Prowl points out. “So please don’t spread that around. In any case, it’s not a problem.”

“It is a little of one.” Mirage says quietly. “Up until now everyone has assumed that you use one. However, battle computers make a very distinctive sound, and it won’t take long for someone to realize you aren’t actually using one anymore. Rumors will spread. The ‘Cons will realize that in order to stop us, they’re going to have to actually kill you.”

Jazz’s grip tightens just a hair, but Prowl ignores that for the moment in favor of scoffing at Mirage. “Then I’ll just have to become sneakier, won’t I?” he retorts. “In either case, it takes a certain amount of memory to simply store the computer. Without it, I’ll be able to remove the extra programs safely and free up that space.”

Ratchet groans. “And you just became *more terrifying.* Thank you. I will sleep so soundly tonight.”

“Mechs sleep soundly because good mechs are willin’ ta do violence on their behalf.” Jazz says softly. “Those mechs sleep soundly because *terrifyin’ mechs* are watchin’ their backs.”

Ratchet just glares at him. “I’ll be sure to add that to my pearls of wisdom collection.” he snips. “Prowl, rest. I mean it. You’re not leaving medbay until that audio has healed.” With that he turns and walks away.

Mirage turns his attention to Jazz. “We have paperwork to file.”

Jazz grins. “True that. Let’s go terrify Prime some more.”

“Anything I should be concerned about?” Prowl asks.

Jazz merely flashes him a wicked smirk. “Ah think we need ta make Blue’s dream of ops a reality.” Prowl considers this for a moment, then smirks right back.

“Then go get us a sniper.”

“O’ course.” Jazz starts to let go of Prowl’s hand, then pauses. “Prowler – don’ make meh watch ya die again. Ah don’ think Ah could survive that.”

Before Prowl can respond, he and Mirage are gone.

/-------/

It doesn’t take long for Prowl to recover. Only two days. During those two days, the team visits him frequently, only being driven out by Ratchet when they overstayed their welcome. Jazz makes it a point to not be alone with Prowl when he’s there. He has no desire to face what almost happened, and at least the others will help keep the conversation away from his reaction. He doesn’t really want Prowl knowing how badly watching him fall affected him.

Still, there’s only so long he can avoid his tac officer – and if he’s honest, he doesn’t try very hard.

Especially not with the rumors.

Word spreads *fast* in the Autobot army. It seems like by the time Prowl is released from medbay, the entirety of Iacon knows about his newly acquired *disability*. Most of the mechs are content to whisper about it behind Prowl’s back. Jazz can live with that. Let the ranks think what they want. Those closest to the team don’t mention it, and Jazz doesn’t expect them to.

It’s Smokescreen that’s a problem. As Prowl settles down in the rec

room for energon, surrounded by his team (which now officially includes Bluestreak and unofficially Blaster), Smokescreen makes a beeline straight for them.

Bluestreak sees it first and groans. “Oh, shit.” The unexpected swear catches the entire team off-guard. Blue sees the looks and calmly points in the direction of Smokey. “He’s on a warpath.”

Jazz looks up, and his entire expression hardens. “Lovely.”

Smokey ignores all of them as he comes to stand just in front of Prowl. Prowl merely looks up at the other Praxian, clearly unperturbed. “May I help you?”

“How arrogant can you be?” Smokey demands. “Most tac can’t even shoot a gun without that battle computer, and you’re going to endanger the lives of your team because you’re too proud to admit that you need the thing?”

For the first time, Jazz sees true anger flash across Prowl’s face. “Even if I had a week, I couldn’t begin to list to you all the ways you’re wrong.” he says softly. In a clear dismissal, he lifts his energon cube and takes a drink.

Smokescreen slaps it out of his hand.

Before anyone can even think to move, Jazz has launched himself across the table and knocked Smokescreen on his back. There’s a dagger at his throat, Jazz’s face inches from his.

The entire rec room holds its breath.

“Ya touch him again, and Ah’ll rip yer spark outta yer chassis.”

To his credit, Smokey doesn’t seem nearly as terrified by this as he should be. “You’re blind, Jazz.” he says softly. “Prowl’s good, but his arrogance is going to get your team – *good mechs* – killed. For nothing. Is that really something you want on your conscience?”

Jazz’s lips twist into a snarl. The rest of the team make no move to leave their table, but Mirage choses now to speak. “Let’s not do that in front of Blue.” he says casually. “Even if he *is* asking for it.”

Prowl looks from Jazz to Mirage and back. Bluestreak can see understanding cross his faceplates, followed quickly by that same anger as before. Slowly, Prowl pushes himself to his feet. His balance

is still off from the healing audio, but he makes his way around the table and kneels on the ground next to Jazz. The dagger is still at Smokey's throat. He places his hand on Jazz's shoulder.

"Smokescreen, I would advise you to shut up right now." he says softly. "Jazz. Look at me, Jazz." Slowly, the visored mech turns his gaze away from Smokescreen. Prowl smiles at him. "I think you're going to need to help me up."

Jazz doesn't exactly smile at that, but his expression relaxes and he puts the dagger away. He slowly stands up, bringing Prowl up with him. "Still off-balance?"

"Just a little."

"All righ', back ta th' room it is." Jazz walks off, Prowl following but still holding on to Jazz's arm. They're out of the rec room by the time Bee speaks.

"That was damned slick of him."

Mirage laughs. "Yeah, like any of us could have gotten him to leave like that."

Smokescreen stares at the group of them even as he clambers to his feet. "None of you care?" he demands.

To everyone's surprise, Bluestreak is the one to speak. "You really need to shut up and leave now, Smokey. It's not your team, so it's not your business."

Finally, Smokescreen just walks away. The team goes back to enjoying each other's company and telling Bluestreak tales of their ops.

Mirage glances at the exit, where Prowl and Jazz have vanished, and he smiles.

damn scary bastards

It's Prowl's idea to go on patrol with Jazz.

Honestly, both of them need to get away from the base. Prowl is getting tired of the sympathetic stares and whispers (he's still on medical leave, light duty only, and everyone *knows it*), and Jazz is one subtle insult away from legitimately killing Smokescreen. So they leave Blaster on comms duty, looking out for them, and they take off to patrol the areas around Iacon.

Iacon hasn't been completely taken over by the Autobots, although it is headquarters. There are still plenty of civilians, and as Prowl and Jazz calmly walk the streets, the civilians crowd around them like they're just regular mechs going for a stroll. It amuses Prowl, to be honest.

It amuses Jazz, too. Prowl can practically see the tension melting from his partner's frame as they get farther and farther away from the base, until they're on the opposite side of Iacon, in the West District. Shops, bars, and theaters give way to museums, warehouses, and a twisting maze of alleys and side streets that can get even the best of mechs lost.

Jazz enjoys watching the civilians. It reminds him of why he even bothered to sign up with the Autobots, back when war was only a passing rumor. It reminds him of what he wanted to protect, back then.

He glances at Prowl, catching sight of the thin scar across his left temple. Interesting how the war has given him something entirely different he wants to protect now.

Prowl catches the look. He also correctly guesses part of what's going through Jazz's processor. "It's like a trophy." he says, indicating the scar with a wave of his hand. Jazz snorts.

"Of what? Yer unfailing luck?"

"I'll have you know luck had nothing to do with that." Prowl huffs. At Jazz's look, he almost laughs. "Okay, yes, that was a lot of luck. I also have stubborn teammates and a damn good medic on hand." Prowl shrugs. "A trophy."

Jazz can't help but grin at that. "Yer jus' lookin' forward ta makin' the Cons lubricate themselves when they realize ya still in th' game." he teases.

Prowl pretends to look affronted. "Of course."

The friendly teasing continues for the next five minutes or so. Prowl watches as Jazz relaxes even further, the dangerous tension bleeding from his frame. He can't help but smile at that.

Maybe by the time they make it back to base, Smokescreen won't be able to rile him up anymore.

Their comms crackle to life as Blaster hails them. *"I've got chatter of Cons in the area. Stay alert."*

Jazz scowls. "Frellin' perfect. Tha's the last thing we need."

Prowl frowns. "Why are Cons in Iacon? They never come into this sector. There's nothing here for them."

"Frag if I know. If I had to hazard a guess, though, I'd say they know where you are."

For a moment, the tactician considers this. His systems have repaired themselves, and he's only a week away from being back on full duty. Jazz already has a knife out, twirling it between his fingers as he keeps a sharp optic out on the crowd around them. Prowl flicks his doorwings, testing the sensors one last time. Everything is functioning perfectly.

"Do I need to send Mirage? Or the Twins?"

Jazz shakes his helm. "Nah, mech. We'll let ya know if we need 'em." Blaster sends back an affirmative. Jazz glances over at Prowl. "Looks like we migh' get ta have a little fun."

Prowl's responding smile is nothing short of vicious, and it sends shivers down Jazz's spine. "Depending on who they sent, we might get to have a lot of fun." he muses. "In this sector, they can't drop anyone on us, at least." Jazz snorts at that.

They don't make it very far before they find their opponents. Jazz grins. "Only three? Mechs, yer slippin'."

Two Praxians and a mini stand just down the alley. Prowl recognizes

the Praxians. They're the only two with the Decepticons – a black and white called Barricade and a dark purple mech called Deadshot. Barricade smirks. "I don't really think so. After all, what good is your tac officer without his computer?"

Prowl merely sighs. "Contrary to popular belief, I'm not an amateur. Unlike some other mechs I could name." He glances at Barricade before dismissing him completely, turning his attention to the other Praxian. "Deadshot. I haven't seen you since the Academy. How've you been?"

Barricade bristles. Deadshot just smirks. "Oh, can't complain. Meeting new mechs, killing them – what's not to love?"

Jazz can't help but laugh. "Ah think Ah like yer sense of humor, mech." he muses. Deadshot takes a mocking bow. Jazz smirks. "So, ya guys gonna just let us continue on our patrol, or are we gonna have a problem?"

Deadshot merely smirks right back. "Sorry. Looks like we're going to cause you a problem, otherwise Megatron will cause us a problem. And we'd rather avoid that."

Prowl hums in agreement. "I can see how you'd like to avoid that. Pity that we'll cause an even bigger problem for you."

Blaster's voice comes again over their internal comms. *"Guys, looks like there are two Seekers in the area as well. Your friends aren't playing fair today."*

Barricade snarls and draws his gun. "It's time to die!"

He opens fire, but he never hits anything. Prowl takes off to the right, Jazz to the left, and the two vanish into the alleys that honeycomb the area. Jazz automatically establishes comms with Prowl.

::Gotta say, mech, this ain' th' party Ah was hopin' fer.::

Even though he can't hear it, Prowl's laughter comes through loud and clear. ::No shit. Circle back around to the Brax Sector. Stick to the alleys – the Seekers can't get a good shot in here.::

Jazz sends back affirmative. ::An' th' grounders?::

::They get what they deserve for ruining our walk.:: Prowl doesn't even wait for the affirmative from Jazz, or the laughter that filters

through their link. He takes shelter under a fire escape, listening intently as the Seekers fly overhead.

Blaster's voice filters through his comm. *"Prowl, stay where you are. They're using thermal scans, and you're hiding rather nicely from them."*

Prowl frowns slightly, taking in that information. "The heat from the factories must be masking my own signature. How do you know they're using thermal scans?"

He can almost hear Blaster's smirk. *"I am not the best damn comms officer for nothing, you know."*

Prowl considers his options. If he stays in one place, he's going to die. Barricade will find him eventually, or maybe the mini, and he'll be forced into a fight he doesn't particularly want right now. However, the factories spot the area from here to the Brax Sector. He should be able to effectively out-maneuver the grounders and hide from the Seekers until he finds his way to Jazz.

Plan in mind, he takes off. ::Jazz, did Blaster tell you about the Seekers?::

::Yep. Ah'm jus' gonna keep a low profile and wait them out.::

::Good. I'll be coming in by way of the factories. Be prepared – I doubt the Seekers will find me, but the others might.::

::Ah got yer six, Prowler, don' worry 'bout that.::

Prowl smiles to himself. ::I have no doubt about it.:: He keeps the connection open even as he falls silent.

There's not too many civilians out here by the factories. Prowl doesn't have to worry about anyone getting caught in the crossfire. However, this also means that if he's found, there's no crowd to lose himself in.

And he is, inevitably, found.

It's Barricade and the mini that actually catch up with him. Barricade lunges, intent on Prowl's doorwings, but he's ready for it. He twists to the left, drawing his own swords as he evades the attack. The mini hangs back, looking for the opportunity to strike, as Barricade continues his attack with his dagger. Prowl can't quite stop a smirk.

He can see what Barricade and the mini can't.

Barricade snarls and steps inside Prowl's reach. His blade nicks Prowl's arm, and he grabs the Con by the elbow and twists, flinging the slightly larger mech over his shoulder. One swift move, and Prowl stabs him through the doorwing with his sword. Barricade screams.

The mini takes the opportunity and launches himself at Prowl's exposed back. He never makes it.

Like a visored demon, Jazz emerges from the shadows and snatches him from the air. It takes seconds for him to slam the mini into the wall, pull his dagger, and make three decisive strokes. The mini falls limp in his grip.

Prowl stands up and turns to face them. Jazz drops the dead mech to the ground, grinning as he holds his prize in his hand. Prowl smiles. "Think you can deal with Smokescreen without killing him now?" he asks.

Jazz laughs. "Sure, mech."

"You're gonna just leave poor 'Cade there?" Deadshot materializes from a different alley, smirking at the moaning mech on the ground. "Gotta say, Prowl – that's cold. Even for you."

Prowl merely arches an optic ridge. "And that's why we got along so well at the Academy." he says pointedly. "Have a good time explaining this to Megs, Deadshot."

With that, Prowl and Jazz vanish into the alleys, leaving Deadshot to deal with the injured Barricade. Deadshot just smiles to himself as he watches them leave.

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Gunner meets them in the rec room. He grins at the smiles on his mechs' faces. "Feeling better, Jazz?" he teases.

"Immensely." Jazz says happily. "Ah feel like Ahm a new mech."

Sitting at his table, Smokescreen frowns. "Did you run into trouble out there?"

"Something like it." Prowl muses. He smirks. "Nothing for you to worry about. It will all be in our report to Gunner. You can take a look then, if you like."

It's not like Prowl to bait someone. Gunner watches, curious. Jazz's gaze flickers between the two Praxians, curious but completely at ease. Smokescreen merely glares at Prowl, wings stiff, but otherwise unwilling to engage. Instead, he merely returns his attention to his energon.

Prowl laughs. "Pity. I was looking forward to that fight."

Jazz snickers. "Only ya, mech." he says affectionately. "Oh, Smokey – catch!" He tosses his prize to Smokey, who snatches it from the air on reflex – only to drop it with an undignified screech a second later.

"JAZZ!"

Gunner can't help it. He's laughing just as hard as Ironhide is as his two best mechs leave the rec room.

"Gotta tell you, Gunner," Ironhide admits, "I like having them around. Never a dull moment."

"You're telling me." Gunner chuckles. "I gotta remind Jazz to stop bringing home body parts. They freak everyone out."

Ironhide just grins. "Ah, let him. Smokey needs the shock every now and again." He walks over to the table and picks up the item. "Oh, chill out, Smokey – it's just some armor! Ain't like he brought home the spark chamber or something!"

Gunner snorts. "Only a matter of time." he mutters to himself. "Only a matter of time."

blessed are the peacemakers

Bumblebee is having flashbacks to Tyger Pax.

Admittedly, this is an infiltration, not an air bombing, but the similarities are enough to send chills down his spinal strut. He's even trapped in the rec room again, albeit with Mirage to one side of him and Cliffjumper to the other. There's a 'Con standing in front of him with a gun pointed at his head. There are at least six others in the room. Those are only the ones in the room, that Bee can see.

That's not counting the ones who are searching the base and gathering up the others. They're keeping the other Autobots in various rooms, and that kind of concerns Bee. The 'Cons are looking for someone, and they're taking great care to keep from getting enough Autobots in one area to cause a problem. Which means they're anticipating the mechs they're looking for to cause enough of a problem already.

At least Optimus isn't on the base – which is actually why this little *raid* is taking place, he realizes. Not only is Optimus not on base, but neither is Ironhide or about a third of base personnel for various political reasons, and Gunner's presence in Iacon isn't a well-known fact. Not to mention that Iacon is predominantly a civilian instillation.

The leader of the Autobots and his SIC are not on base, and as far as the 'Cons know, the TIC isn't here either. Bee has to hide a little smile at that.

Damn, Soundwave is stupid.

The 'Con in front of him tilts his helm, listening in on his comm. "What do you mean, you can't find them?" he demands. "We've only got two here, there's at least two more! Find them, damn it!"

Mirage pings Bee's private comm. ::Think they're after us?:: With Soundwave probably in the area, comms are a bad idea, but Mirage is willing to risk it. If they're careful, they won't give away anything useful.

::No doubt.:: Bee replies dryly. ::At least we've got one on the outside.:: Hound was on patrol, and Blaster took comms so Mirage could get some well-earned recharge. The 'Con with his gun on Bee doesn't seem to be aware of the conversation. Bee glances to the side at Cliffjumper, who's scowling at the 'Con. ::Jumper could be a

problem.::

::When is Jumper not a problem?:: Mirage mutters. ::Do we know where our fearless leaders are?::

::Nope, and quite frankly, I'm glad. We'll find them when the 'Cons do no doubt.::

Bee has to nod at that. There's a crash from somewhere outside the rec room, and three of the 'Cons rush off to investigate. He glances at Mirage. "Now?"

Mirage glances around and grins. "Yeah, this is good." With that, he blinks out of sights.

Cliffjumper swears. "What the hell?"

The 'Con in front of Bee drops to the ground, energon spraying from his throat. Bee quickly lunges forward and grabs the gun from the corpse before standing up and opening fire on the second mech. He drops him quickly. The third one falls a few seconds later, dagger shoved into his spark chamber.

And Mirage blinks back into existence. He grins at Bee. "Have I mentioned I love that trick?"

"Once or twice." Bee laughs. Jumper just stares at them from his position on the ground, mouth open. Bee grins at him. "What? Did you think we call him Mirage for nothing?"

The door slides open, and Hound walks in, gun drawn. He does a quick head count and breathes a sigh of relief. "Remind anyone of Tyger Pax?" he asks dryly. Bee and Mirage quickly cross to his side.

Mirage merely smiles. "We weren't there."

"He was." Hound points out. "So was Prowl. You remember how bad that was?"

"He's right." Bee says. "We should go find the others before the 'Cons do." He turns his attention to Jumper. "Where are the other minis?"

Jumper blinks. "Scattered around. I can gather them up."

"Good. Do it, and cause chaos. There's more than just these assholes here."

For a moment, the two just stare at each other. Mirage thinks that Jumper might just say no. He might just flat out refuse to do anything that might help the ops team. Instead, Jumper simply nods.

“You got it.”

The four of them leave the rec room and split up.

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Prowl has to admit – once again, he really should have anticipated this.

The tac room has been barricaded off. He crouches on one side of the barricade (which is actually just the desk, but thankfully it’s a *sturdy* desk), gun held tightly in his hand. Like before, he was alone when the call from Blaster hit his comms. Like before, he doesn’t know where his team is, and it’s driving him insane.

This time, comms aren’t down because of an aerial bombing. Prowl knows Soundwave is in the base. The Decepticon TIC is the only one downright *stupid* enough to launch this kind of attack, and that means he’s probably scanning the comms frequency looking for them.

At this time of the day, Prowl knows Bee is in the rec room (and that *really* doesn’t make him feel any better). Mirage is probably awake by now and with him. Hound has probably made his way back into the base and is with Mirage and Bee.

That still leaves Blue and Jazz, and Prowl simply doesn’t know. Blue was with the Twins. Jazz was down in the training room.

He decides to take a risk. He needs to make sure his team is okay, but he doesn’t have to know where they are. So he fires up his comm link.
::Sound off!::

::Mirage, Bee, and Hound.::

::Blue here!::

::Jazz here, Prowler.::

Mechs are shooting at him still, but Prowl heaves a sigh of relief. The most Soundwave might have gotten from that is that his team is alive. Not their locations. “Thank Primus.” he murmurs. A shot hits the wall right over his head. He raises his gun up and opens fire.

This is why Prowl doesn't use a gun. He can't aim worth a *shit*.

"Prowler, down!"

Prowl doesn't think. He ducks down, pressing his back against the barricade and curling up into the tightest ball possible, arms covering his head. The explosion on the other side of the barricade is absolutely not surprising. He waits until the shockwave passes before slowly coming out of his crouch and poking his head over the barricade.

Jazz and Gunner stand there, Gunner examining the carnage of five or six exploded mechs, and Jazz watching Prowl. He grins at the Praxian. "Figured ya'd be here."

Prowl laughs at that and straightens up, stepping over the barricade and joining the two in the hallway. "What did you do – follow the sound of really bad shots?"

Gunner chuckles. "Something like that. It'd be a piss-poor leader that can't find his TO." He motions for them to follow. "Let's go make sure Soundwave regrets this little endeavor of his, hm?"

Prowl and Jazz exchange grins. "O' course, mech."

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Soundwave surveys the rec room. There are no Autobots there. There are, however, three dead Decepticons, both shot and cut. Behind his face mask, he scowls.

This is not good.

::Decepticons: Report.::

Silence.

::Decepticons: Report.::

Still silence. His scowl becomes more pronounced. He's about to call out again, but a soldier bursts into the rec room, breathing hard and covered in energon. All of it appears to be his. "Boss, we have a problem." the mech stammers. "We didn't realize –"

He's abruptly shoved into the room, and Gunner stands behind him, an easy smile on his faceplates. "Soundwave. You are such a moron. Nice to know your information network is just as inept as always."

“Gunner.” This is not someone he wants to tangle with. “Query: Are all of them dead?”

The Autobot TIC merely shrugs. “If they’re not, they will be soon. My team doesn’t appreciate having their home broken into. They tend to take it personally.” He takes a step forward. “I’m giving you one chance, and one chance only. You showed me mercy in the past, once. This time, I’m paying the debt.”

Soundwave isn’t stupid. He knows exactly what Gunner is referring to. “I am allowed to leave. My men will die here.”

“Exactly. Just like the deal you gave me.”

For a long moment, Soundwave and Gunner just stare at each other. After that moment, Soundwave smiles. Even though he can’t see it, Gunner can tell. “Still my friend.”

That earns him a wry smirk. “Just this time.” It’s an acknowledgement and a warning. “Leave, Soundwave. My mechs will make sure that you are not harmed.”

Soundwave has never been accused of being stupid. This was a foolish endeavor, one he never would have attempted if his intelligence had informed him of Gunner’s presence. With a small nod to Gunner, he leaves the base.

There are bodies strewn everywhere. Soundwave merely steps over them and leaves the base.

This is going to be hard to explain to Megatron.

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Optimus and Ironhide return that night after Gunner’s report. Gunner is waiting for them outside the base, flanked by Jazz and Prowl. Prime sighs. “How did they get in?”

“How do any of us get in?” Prowl asks blandly. “They used the front door.”

“This is no time to be snide.” Ironhide snaps. Prowl glares at him.

“I wish I was, but I’m not. They literally waltzed in through the front door, because we have shit security.” From beside him, Jazz snorts, trying to hide his laughter. Prowl continues like he can’t hear him.

“How about this – instead of having a repeat of Tyger Pax, we find someone who actually knows what the hell they’re doing to come in and make sure we all don’t die in horrifying ways?”

Optimus exchanges looks with Gunner and Ironhide. Ironhide looks like he’s ready to strangle Prowl. Gunner just looks vastly amused.

From the entrance, where the minis are stacking up the body parts for disposal, Cliffjumper speaks. “Um, Prime? This is gonna shock the hell out of you, but I’m kinda with Prowl on this one. As much fun as this was, I’d rather not do it again.”

Jazz flashes him a wicked grin. “Yer learnin’.”

“Yeah, whatever. You’re still a pain in my ass.”

“’m okay wit’ that.”

Optimus just sighs. Oh, hell. “Fine. I’ll call in Red Alert.”

new old faces

Chapter Notes

> I am so sorry for the delay! My nephew made me sit down and watch Into the Spiderverse, and now guess what I'm writing for? But I am not giving up, we're over halfway there!

When Red Alert arrives in Iacon, he's not expecting to be greeted by Prowl and Optimus Prime.

Optimus, yes. He is, after all, to be the security officer for the base. Once Red Alert got word that Iacon was housing an ops team, he's expected the call. He just wasn't expecting that team to be *Prowl's*.

Honestly, he never anticipated seeing the mech again. And considering some of the shit they caused in the Academy, that would have been in the best interest of the Autobot cause. Between Red Alert's paranoia and Prowl's cunning, the two of them had gotten away with far more than they really should have.

He lets Optimus guide him around the base, taking mental note of all the various weaknesses in security. For a moment, he wonders how two highly suspicious and paranoid mechs like Prowl and Jazz have managed to stay in such a low-security place for so long. He puts the thought aside and keeps going.

Eventually, Optimus cuts him loose to get settled in, leaving him and Prowl alone. For a moment, the two simply stare at each other. Suddenly, Prowl smiles.

"Good to see you again, Red."

Red Alert can't help but crack a grin. "Good for us. Bad for them." he quips. Prowl chuckles at that. Red Alert continues. "So – does your team leader know that we know each other?"

"Of course he does." Prowl never loses that smile. "I don't keep secrets from him."

"So, you've told him."

"He figured it out the same way Mirage figured out about my battle computer. They're ops. I don't have to spell these things out for them."

“Speaking of.” Red Alert motions to the scar on the side of Prowl’s helm. “What happened?”

“Knife to the helm. Took it out.”

Red Alert blinks. “And you survived that?” he demands. “You are damned lucky.”

Prowl’s smile morphs into a smirk. “I think the fact that it wasn’t fully connected anymore had a lot to do with it. Bare basics, remember? To give it the impression of being connected?” Red Alert snorts at that. Prowl continues. “I don’t believe any of our modifications ever made it into my medical files.”

“Of course not. First Aid owed me a few favors.” Red snaps. “You know if they make you install a new one, I don’t think that *trick* of yours is going to work again.”

“Probably not.” Prowl admits. “They’ve come a long way since the Academy. I could give it a try, but I’d probably wind up glitching more than just the computer.” Red Alert nods. Prowl merely inclines his helm. “I can show you to your quarters.”

“Show me yours first.” Red Alert sighs. “Seriously, how you and Jazz tolerate this place –“

“The fact that Iacon is primarily civilian does afford us some level of protection.” Prowl replies mildly. “But you’re right. We really should have anticipated this, especially after Tyger Pax.” He sighs. “We don’t actually have team quarters yet. Perhaps you can help us out with that.”

“How are you split up?”

“Me, Jazz, and Blaster are sharing, Blue is with the Twins, Mirage and Hound are together, and Bee is with Jumper.”

Red Alert does the calculations. “Blue is a new member. We’ll have to accommodate for him. He’s getting his adult upgrades tomorrow, right?” A nod. “Okay, that’ll make things a little easier. Are you anticipating the Twins or Blaster joining the team?”

“Blaster, yes, the Twins, no.” Prowl says dryly. “I imagine Blue will be spending more time with the Twins than he does with us during off-hours.”

“Okay. That makes the job a little simpler. I’ll find a security set-up for seven regardless.” They stop just outside of the general quarters. “Prowl – what are you going to do if they make you take a new computer?”

Prowl flicks his doorwings in a dismissive gesture. “I don’t imagine they will. Prime knows I’ve done all my planning so far without one. Gunner is happy with my work, and so is Jazz. That’s really all that matters, and barring anything drastic, I don’t see Prime willing to disrupt a working setup.”

“You’re going to paint an even bigger target on your back than there already is.”

“Perhaps. But I can handle that. I won’t get my team killed.”

“You won’t get *Jazz* killed.” Red Alert says pointedly. Prowl merely shrugs. Red sighs. “Fine, whatever. I’ll see you around then.” With that he heads off to find his new quarters.

Prowl waits until he’s out of audio range before speaking. “How long were you planning on following me?”

Jazz comes to stand by his side and chuckles. “Yeah, well, ya knew Ah was listenin’.” He nudges him with his shoulder. “Confirmed a suspicion of mine, though. Couldn’ figure out how a battle computer glitches as badly as yours did, and not get fixed, unless you did it on purpose.”

Prowl smiles. “Like I said, I don’t really have to spell anything out for you, do I?”

“Nah, mech. Not anythin’.” He loops his arm around Prowl’s and guides him towards the rec room. “Let’s get some energon, yeah?” Prowl smiles and lets him take the lead.

/-------/

Over the next few days, Red Alert begins installing his new security measures. He’s only mildly surprised to have Jazz watch him as he does it. He doesn’t talk. He just watches and helps when Red Alert asks him to. It’s actually quite unnerving to have that laser focus directed at him.

On the second day of this, Red Alert breaks the silence. “I’m guessing you know by now that Prowl is my friend.”

“Yep.” Jazz hands him a laser drill and takes a step back out of the way. Red Alert crouches on the ground and begins installing the hardware for an electronic trip wire. It’s a passive system that can read spark signatures, so it’s installed at the main entrance. This will be the first line of defense for the base. Any spark that’s registered as unfriendly or hidden by a spark dampener will set off the next line of defense. Jazz watches him work. “An’ Ah know th’ two of ya screwed wit Prowl’s computer back in the Academy.”

Red Alert grimaces. “So you were listening. I was wondering about that.” He glances up at the visored mech. “Prowl asked me to. I generally don’t make it a habit to screw around with processors.”

“Ah know he did.” Jazz says mildly. “Prowler has a hell of a lot of loyalty, even back when he had no team ta be loyal to. Ah appreciate that.”

“And?”

“An’ if there’s somethin’ that he did because of that loyalty tha’ might get him hurt now, Ah need ta know about it. He protects mah team. It’s mah job ta protect him.”

Red Alert snorts at that. “Let’s face it, Jazz – you aren’t protecting Prowl because it’s your *duty*. You can at least admit to that much.”

Jazz nods. “Maybe. But ya ever think that some things are better left unspoken? Ya know, giant targets an’ all that.”

Understanding flashes across Red Alert’s face. He decides to answer the first question instead of pressing the matter. “It’s only a problem if they make Prowl install a new one. Those kinds of computers require pretty extensive programming that I don’t know a lot about, but there’s a reason everyone in tac uses them. Prowl would be the first.”

For a long moment, Jazz just stands there considering as Red Alert finishes installing the hardware. He pulls out a connector from his forearm and plugs it into the hardware before initiating the download for the software. Finally, the visored mech smiles.

“Point taken.” With that he turns and walks away.

Red Alert just shrugs and returns to his work. “Strange mechs.”

bad moon rising

Chapter Notes

> Welcome to the second arc of the story! Thanks for hanging in there with me, and I love all of the comments and kudos that have been coming this story's way. You guys are the best!

Jazz has to admit – he's grateful to be running ops again. His team is *good,* and to waste that good by having them sit around just grates at him. Of course, he probably wouldn't have been sitting around for so long if he had accepted a temporary TO while Prowl was on medical leave, but that's entirely beside the point.

This time it's infiltration – and for once, Prowl isn't in the field with them. The base at Kaon is one of Megatron's most guarded, and to have the entire team inside would be suicide. So this time it's just Jazz, Mirage, and Bee, with Bluestreak on the outskirts of the city for cover and Prowl and Hound at the checkpoint six kilometers away. Close enough to come save all their asses, not close enough to get caught with the rest.

Jazz plants the last of his bombs and pings his teammates over their private, encrypted comm links. ::Ah'm good ta go.:: he says. ::How about ya?::

::We're almost done.:: Mirage replies. ::Bee just needs a few more minutes.::

::You two might want to hurry up.:: Prowl says in amusement. ::They're not going to stay distracted by Blue's diversion for long.::

Jazz can hear Blue's delighted laughter across their link. ::Nope, but for now I have them chasing their tails!::

Jazz almost says something about that – Blue's *diversion* is almost a sparkling game. He's been launching metal projectiles at the walls of the base, making the guards chase the sounds. It's the kind of prank that Jazz used to pull all the time at the Academy, and it almost makes him laugh to know that their youngling knows the same trick.

Then he senses something behind him, and he twists around, daggers falling into his hands.

Deadshot stands there and grins at him. “I thought I’d find you here.”

Jazz hesitates. His instincts scream at him to *take care of this, but, well – Deadshot is Prowl’s friend. Prowl seemed content to let him walk away, and Jazz has always been content to follow Prowl’s lead. Still – “What ya doin’ here?”*

“Looking for you, actually.” Deadshot glances at the bomb, but otherwise doesn’t seem perturbed. “I have some information for you and Prowl. Probably Optimus Prime, too. Figured if I hung around here long enough, you guys would make a go at the base.”

That’s really not the answer Jazz is expecting. He pings Prowl’s comm again. ::Prowler?::

::If he says he has information, he does.:: Prowl says, but his voice lacks the ease of before. ::Deadshot’s sneaky, but he’s never lied outright to me.::

Jazz really could point out that he would actually be lying to Jazz, but he understands the same as Prowl and probably Deadshot. Lying to Jazz is lying to Prowl. Jazz merely inclines his helm. “Ah don’ need ta tell ya what Ah’m gonna do ta ya if ya screw us over.”

“No.”

“Good.” Jazz sends out a signal to his bombs. ::Change o’ plans. Ya’ll got two minutes ta finish up an’ get out.::

::You got it, boss.:: Mirage replies. Jazz turns his attention back to Deadshot.

“Follow me, an’ stick close.” ::Guys, Ah’m bringin’ in a tag-a-long. Don’ shoot him.::

He doesn’t even wait for the affirmative as his team slowly makes their way out of the base and back to the checkout. Bluestreak meets them there, helm tilted to the side in curiosity. “I’m guessing he’s not a prisoner?”

“Not for the moment.” Prowl appears behind the group and places his hand on Blue’s shoulder. “I’m assuming you’re not here to defect, Deadshot?”

The other Praxian grins. “That depends on how things go. You might want to register me as a prisoner of war. Maybe I’ll make a miraculous escape later, if I don’t just defect.”

For a moment, no one speaks. As one, the team looks at Prowl. Prowl

considers Deadshot for a moment before turning his attention to Jazz. "Not a bad idea, all things considered." he says quietly.

Jazz pings his private comm. ::Prowler?::

::He's not lying about having information, but I only trust him so far.:: Prowl explains quietly. ::If we need to, he won't be making any miraculous escape.::

Jazz just manages to not smirk at that. ::Ah like that plan, Prowler.:: "Come on, Deadshot. We gonna git all of us back ta base, we gotta go now."

They leave the area just as the first of the bombs start to detonate.

/-------/

Back at Iacon, Optimus Prime waits for them just outside the base. Ironhide stands to his left. Gunner is there as well, just by the entrance and to Prime's right, somewhat out of sight. Deadshot arches an optic ridge. "It's almost like you don't trust me, Prowl." he murmurs.

Prowl ignores that. He stands to one side of Deadshot, Mirage to the other, both with weapons drawn but not held on the Decepticon between them. Optimus gives them a look before turning his attention to Jazz. "Why did you bring him here?"

Jazz shrugs. "He said he had information fer us." he says bluntly. "Figured we should hear him out."

Optimus nods and turns his attention to Deadshot. "What information do you have?"

"I think this is a conversation best had indoors, Prime." Deadshot says darkly. "I don't want to be overheard."

"I don't think so." Ironhide scowls. "You tell us at least the gist of it, and then we'll decide if we're gonna hear you out or throw you in the brig. Or we'll just toss you there now. Choice is yours, 'Con."

Deadshot slides Prowl a look. Prowl sighs. "I would like to point out that Deadshot isn't exactly an enemy here, Ironhide." he says quietly.

Optimus nods. "I'm aware of some of your shared history." he replies. "But right now, he is a Decepticon, and we need to treat him as such."

Jazz shrugs. "Whatever ya say, Prime. But Ah trust Prowler on this one."

“Of course you do.” Gunner says dryly.

Finally, Deadshot sighs. “Fine, whatever.” He vents hard, hands clenching into fists.

“Shockwave’s back in Iacon. And he’s after Prowl.”

don't shoot the messenger

It's an odd group gathered into the conference room. Optimus, Ironhide, Gunner, Prowl, Jazz, and Red Alert, along with one lone Decepticon. It's almost enough to make Deadshot nervous, but he hides it well. He simply faces Optimus and Ironhide, Gunner to his left, Red Alert to his right, and Prowl and Jazz somewhere behind him. He's surrounded, and he knows it.

Optimus starts things off. "What do you mean, Shockwave is after Prowl?" There's an edge to his voice Deadshot isn't expecting from what he knows about the easygoing Autobot leader. He really wants to glance behind him at Prowl, but instinct has him keeping his optics on Optimus.

"Just what I said. Prowl's on his radar. They've reformatted one of the old bases around Iacon to suit his needs, and now he's started the hunt."

"Why?" Ironhide asks. "I mean, I know Shockwave is some kind of scientist, but what does a scientist need a tac officer for?"

Deadshot hesitates. "You don't know? I figured your intel would have heard the rumors at least."

"I have." Gunner says quietly. "Shockwave leaves a trail of broken mechs wherever he goes. Apparently, he has a thing for experimentation. He likes to take mechs apart to see what makes them tick." At Ironhide's look, he shrugs. "What? For a while he was into twins. When Sunstreaker and Sideswipe came to us, Ratchet had me look into anything that might be a threat."

"And Shockwave made that list?" Prowl asks, speaking up for the first time. Gunner nods.

"Yeah. But he lost interest not too long after. I kept tabs on him, but he's never been considered a serious threat. Megatron keeps him at arm's length."

"For glaringly obvious reasons." Deadshot adds. "Even Megatron is freaked out by this mech. Shockwave is bat-shit crazy."

Prowl nods and falls silent. Optimus picks it up again. "Why Prowl?"

Deadshot taps the side of his helm. “No battle computer.”

Prowl makes a scoffing sound. “Oh, is that all.” he mutters. Jazz casts him a look, but Prowl doesn’t seem to be concerned. In fact, there’s nothing about his body language that suggests he’s phased at all by this news. Jazz inclines his helm in question, and Prowl just flicks his wings in a dismissive gesture.

Deadshot doesn’t miss the exchange, but he chooses not to comment. “I don’t think you realize just how unique that makes you, Prowl.” he says quietly. “Once word got around that you never reinstalled your computer, Shockwave made the connection that you probably never used it to begin with. No tac officer does that.”

Prowl inclines his helm. “No tac officer bothers to try.” he says flatly. “I don’t do anything that any other mech isn’t capable of doing.”

“That’s what you think.” Red Alert comments dryly.

Now that has Gunner’s attention. “What made you want to try?”

Prowl merely smiles. “I never intended to be tac.”

“We’re getting off the subject.” Optimus cuts across the conversation. Jazz’s gaze flickers from Prowl to Prime, and understanding flashes across his face. Still, he keeps his observations to himself. “What is Shockwave planning to do with Prowl if he gets him?”

“Take him apart.” Deadshot says bluntly. “Like Gunner said, Shockwave has a thing for dissection. Usually while the mech is still alive. There’s also processor jacking and other various things he can do to get the information he wants.”

“In other words, there won’t be much left.” Ironhide says.

“Precisely.”

There’s a brief moment of tense silence. It’s broken by Red Alert’s snort of laughter. Ironhide glares at him. “What’s so funny?”

“You’re pissing Prowl off, and I think it’s funny.” Red says with a small grin. “Tell me, Prowl – how many plans do you already have to take down Shockwave?”

“Six.” Prowl says dryly. “Give me some more information, and I’ll make it 12.”

Optimus sighs. “Fine. Prowl, Jazz, Red Alert – go. Get the information you need to take Shockwave out.” The three nod and leave the conference room. Optimus turns his focus to Deadshot. “You are going to tell us everything you know about Shockwave’s experiments, and how you know it.”

“Before that, I want to know why we should trust you.” Gunner says.

Deadshot shrugs. “That’s the easiest answer to give you. Prowl’s my friend. We wound up on opposite sides, but that doesn’t change that he’s my friend. I don’t want him to die unless I’m the one who kills him.”

“You’ll make it clean.” Optimus says quietly.

“Exactly.” Deadshot squares his shoulders. “Now, as for the rest . . . . “

/---------/

The tac room is abandoned except for Jazz and Prowl. Red Alert went to his own office to see what his information network could shake out. Jazz doesn’t let the silence stand for long. “Yer not afraid of Shockwave.”

Prowl shakes his helm. “No.”

“Why not? Ya heard what he c’n do ta ya.”

That earns Jazz a small smirk. “Yes, but that would require him to catch me, and we both know that’s not happening.” he says.

Jazz gaze lingers on the scar on Prowl’s helm. “An’ yet, despite everythin’, ya still got caught once before.”

For a moment, Prowl just stares at him. Finally, he sighs. “Yes, and it would have been a clean kill. Jazz, you know enough of my past to understand me when I say this – there is nothing Shockwave can do to me that I haven’t faced before. So no, I’m not afraid of Shockwave. He’s an abuser and a bully, and he will die.”

The certainty in Prowl’s tone, coupled with all the implications, sends a shiver down Jazz’s spine. He decides to change the subject. “Ya didn’ wanna be tac?”

It’s glaringly obvious, but Prowl smiles and rolls with it. “Nope. That’s where Prime wanted me.”

“Ya originally signed up fer ops, didn’ ya?” Jazz can’t help the slow grin that spreads across his face. “Ya were gonna be an ops leader, like meh. An’ ops leaders need ta be able ta plan on their feet.”

“And then I got to the Academy, and realized Prime had changed my placement.” Prowl says. He flashes Jazz a grin. “But I think things worked out for the best.”

“At least now Ah know why ya refuse ta stay outta th’ field.” Jazz teases. “C’mon, mech – let’s get some energon and see what th’ team is up ta.”

Prowl allows him to hook their arms together. “Of course.”

murphy's law, pt 2

Chapter Notes

> I have not forgotten about this story, I promise! Spiderverse and real life just decided to kick my ass together.

Locating the lab was easy. Too easy, in Prowl and Red Alert's opinion. It's far enough outside of Iacon to not attract attention, but close enough that it would have eventually gotten their notice even without Deadshot's warning.

Prowl stays at the checkpoint, a fortified area about 10 clicks south of the lab, and Bluestreak finds a spot about 200 meters higher than him. He's in the perfect position to guard both the checkpoint and the entrance to Shockwave's lab. Prowl opens up his padd and brings up the blueprints – or what they've been able to find, anyway.

::I would like to go on record saying this is a phenomenally bad idea. Again.:: he says dryly.

::Noted. Agin.:: Jazz teases back.

::I could give Prowl my gun if it makes him feel better.:: Bluestreak chimes in. ::With this scope, even he can't miss.::

::All right, guys, ease up.:: Prowl can't help but laugh with his team. ::We all know that even with Blue's scope, I still couldn't hit the broad side of Megatron.::

::Which is why you'll eventually just shank him.:: Bee teases back.

::All righ' guys, settle down.:: Jazz's voice cuts across the banter, unusually serious. ::We're about ta breach. Me an' Bee from th' front, Mirage an' Hound from th' rear.::

::Copy.:: Prowl says. He can see the spark signatures on his padd, marking the areas where his team have been positioned. ::Start the live feed.:: Jazz activates the recorder built into his visor, and the feed pops up in the corner of the padd. ::Looks good. No interference so far.::

::Let's see how long it lasts.:: Jazz says, grin evident in his voice. ::Breachin' now.::

There is absolutely no warning. The door slides open just enough for Jazz and Bee to sneak in and shuts behind them. Prowl barely has time to catch a glimpse of the large auditorium-like room, and then the feed goes dark. Prowl curses.

::Jazz, I lost the feed. Walk me through it.:: Silence. ::Jazz, the feed is down. Report.::

There's nothing, no response, and their spark signatures have vanished from Prowl's padd. Alarm races through him, cold and sharp. ::Team, sound off!::

Nothing from any of them.

Blue pings his comm. ::What are your orders?::

Prowl's already checking his weapons and plotting the fastest path from the checkpoint to the base. ::Contact Blaster if you can. We're gonna need medical on standby. Otherwise, make sure no one shoots me between here and there.::

He doesn't give Blue a chance to reply. He just takes off. When he makes it to the door, he hesitates. Jazz must have set off some sort of trap. He'll do the team no good if he gets caught in the same trap. Slowly, he pushes the door open and takes a step back. Nothing happens. Venting hard, he pings Blue one more time. ::You're probably going to lose contact with me. If I'm not out in 30 minutes, leave us here and get Gunner. Got it?::

::Please. You'll be out of there in 20.::

Prowl grins. ::I like that thought. Here goes.:: He slides inside and lets the door close behind him.

The effect is immediate and disorienting. There's some sort of dampener, and it's damned strong. Prowl can barely feel his own spark pulse, and the extra vibrations have rendered his doorwings useless. He can't tell the difference between the dampener and any other source of data. He can't even sense air currents like he usually can. He scowls.

This is going to *suck*.

He draws his short swords and keeps his back to the wall, making a slow circle around the room. It's not an auditorium like he first thought – but clearly Shockwave puts on shows here. On the far side

of the room cages line the walls, and Prowl can easily see Mirage, Hound, and Bee in some of those cages. Mirage and Hound look out of it – the dampener must be interfering with their bond. Bee has been placed in between them, and Prowl can see him talking quietly to them, probably keeping them level. White-hot fury flares in him, but it's what's in the center of the room that really has his energon boiling.

There's a medical berth, and Jazz is laying on it. Shockwave stands beside him, one hand on his shoulder, single optic glowing in the dim light. Jazz's visor is dark. The dampener must have shorted it out. There must be something else going on as well. There are no restraints immediately apparent, but Jazz is not even attempting to escape.

Something is very, very wrong.

"Tell me where Prowl is." Jazz doesn't respond. Shockwave seems to smile. "You will. Either you will tell me, or I'll dig it out of you. Your choice."

Prowl scowls. Shockwave must have jacked into Jazz, and only far enough to keep him immobilized. Prowl has heard horror stories about Jazz's firewalls. If Prowl can kill the dampener, they can all get out. Doing so will also reveal his presence, which Shockwave hasn't seemed to notice yet.

Yep. This is going to *suck*.

With Shockwave distracted, Prowl moves.

/-------/

Jazz is unaware of Prowl's current location, but he knows the Praxian won't stay away for long. If he's smart, he'll be on his way back to the base to get help. That means a day or two of torture for Jazz, but that's nothing he hasn't endured before. He's more concerned about how Mirage and Hound will hold up under the dampener. Trapped as he is, he knows it has to be worse for them.

Can they even still sense each other?

"If you won't tell me, maybe I can pry it out of one of your teammates. Bumblebee, perhaps?"

Before Jazz can come up with a scathing retort, the dampener shuts off, along with the power. There's about two seconds of the kind of

absolute silence that comes with a power outage.

Then there's an explosion.

Shockwave disconnects from Jazz, turning slightly to see what's going on, and Jazz immediately stabs him in the chassis and rolls away. He reaches out on the comm links. ::Prowl, mah visor's shot. Ya gotta guide meh – where am Ah goin'?::

::I have you.:: It's Blue's voice that answers him, and that makes him very, very nervous. ::90 degree turn to the right, 10 steps forward. That will put you in front of Mirage.::

Jazz follows Blue's direction, and the sniper walks him through unlocking all three cages. He grabs Bee by the arm. ::Git them outta here. Ah gotta git Prowler.::

::Think you'll be able to find him?::

::Ah don' know, but Ah gotta try.:: There's a growing heat source to his left. The lab is on fire and burning quickly. He has no clue where Shockwave is, but he can imagine the Decepticon is hunting Prowl as well. ::Go, Bee!::

::Don't worry about me.:: Prowl's voice cuts across his rising panic. ::Get out of here. I'll be right behind you.::

::Where are ya?::

He can almost sense Prowl's smirk. ::Working. Give me about five minutes to lose him and I'll be out. Bee, get moving.::

::Copy.:: Bee gently pushes Jazz forward, and he reluctantly guides the team out of the base, Blue's voice in his ear the entire time.

They make it to the checkpoint, and Jazz immediately rounds on Blue. "Where's Prowler?" Blue doesn't immediately answer, and Jazz takes a step forward. "Blue, Ah'm gonna ask ya one more time – *where is Prowl?"*

"In there." Blue says quietly. "Pretty sure he's the reason the lab is on fire."

Jazz freezes. "Stay here. Ah'm gonna go git him."

"How?" Hound demands. "Blue can't guide you to Prowl when he's probably running from Shockwave!"

Before Jazz can retort, he hears another explosion, followed by a very familiar laugh. “More like making Shockwave chase his own tail.” Prowl says easily. He puts his hand on Jazz’s shoulder, and the smaller mech almost sags against him in relief. It’s definitely Prowl – Jazz is close enough to be able to feel his spark signature.

Blue grins. “19 minutes, 30 seconds.”

Prowl laughs again. “Damn, Blue. Called it. Is medical on standby?”

“Yep. Just waiting for us to get back to base.”

“I think that will buy us the time to limp back.” He squeezes Jazz’s shoulder, but doesn’t let go, and for that Jazz is grateful. “Come on. Let’s get back home.”

the things we put up with

Bluestreak is the only mech not suffering from the effects of the dampener.

Mirage and Hound have been sequestered away in one of the medbay's private rooms. They have been for the better part of two days, and no one has attempted to bother them. Ratchet won't even let Jazz in there, and he's the team leader. Jazz knows enough about bonds and dampeners to simply request his updates from Ratchet himself.

Bee got lucky. He hasn't been in ops long enough to have too much specialized equipment. It only takes about half a day for his internal repair systems to work their magic and return sensation to his plating.

Jazz and Prowl weren't quite as lucky. Jazz's visor is shot, and it'll take a few more days for Ratchet to make him a new one. Until then, he's blind – and consequently confined to medbay. Prowl's doorwings need to be completely rewired, and of course being doorwings, Ratchet has to handle that himself instead of letting Prowl's internal repairs do the job.

Which would have been made a lot easier if Prowl didn't also have smoke and fire damage. Ratchet examines the damage done to his right doorwing at the joint. At first, he thought that was fire damage, but now he can see claw marks. He grimaces. "Another close call?" he asks quietly.

"That actually wasn't Shockwave." Prowl muses. "Apparently he has drones. Between the fire and the dampener, I never saw it coming."

Jazz slides up behind Prowl and gently touches the damage, letting his fingers gauge the severity of the wound. His lips twist in a scowl. "How did that *not* take yer doorwing off?"

"Pretty sure that's what he was aiming for." Prowl says easily. "The one plus side of the dampener is that nothing hurts. That and I move fast when I need to." He flashes Jazz a grin the visored mech can't see, but he can hear. "Ops luck."

Ratchet sighs. "Well, it's not bleeding anymore. That's good. Give me a few minutes – I need to get some supplies from storage. That joint probably needs to be replaced, too." With that he walks off.

There's a moment of silence after the door closes. Prowl is the one to break it. "You have something to say. So say it."

Jazz crosses his arms over his chassis, fists clenched. "Might not be th' best idea."

"Maybe not, but you need to say it. And since when have we stood on propriety?"

That earns Prowl a dark look. "That ain' th' point." Still, he sighs and looks away. "Ya know, it ain' in yer job description ta run inta danger. It's in mine."

Prowl arches an optic ridge. "Your point?"

"Why do ya keep doin' it?" Jazz finally lifts his helm to face Prowl. Despite the dark visor, he's locked on to the Praxian's position. "Why do ya keep runnin' straight inta danger like that? Ya played right inta Shockwave's hands!"

"Do you really expect me to stay away when I can help?"

"That's why ya stay at th' checkpoint. Ya know, *where Shockwave can' kill ya.*"

Prowl doesn't even bother to acknowledge that one. "The feed was cut. The dampener kept me from being able to even track you. More importantly, I lost communications with the entire team."

"Ya shoulda gone fer help. Ah can' believe Ah'm sayin' this, but that's protocol, Prowler!" His hands start to shake. "Th' TO is th' most important position on th' team. Ya know that – take down tac, ya take down th' team!"

He sounds like he wants to yell. His body language screams of pent-up frustration and anger. For a brief moment, Prowl wonders if it's worth triggering the impending blow-out. It's clear this is about far more than Prowl's importance to the team. However, this really isn't the time or the place.

"And if I had followed protocol?" he asks quietly. "You see the damage done to Mirage and Hound already. You were being tortured. How long before Shockwave moved on to Bee? How long before he got curious and decided to open up Mirage or Hound?" He takes a step forward, optics darkening. "Would they have even lived long enough for help to arrive?"

“So ya jus’ decided ta take things on yerself then?”

“Pretty much. It worked, didn’t it?”

“It shouldn’ have. Ya should have died back there.”

Prowl offers a crooked grin. “Ops luck.”

Jazz can’t help a choked laugh. “Will ya do me a favor an’ at least *pretend* like yer gonna follow orders next time?”

“If I could, I would.” Prowl shakes his helm. “But unless we find a way to counteract the dampener, Hound and Mirage have to stay on the outside. Blue probably will as well. That means you’re going to need another mech on the ground, and you know it’s gonna be me.”

Jazz scowls, then sighs. “Well, it was nice ta dream.”

Silence falls between them again. Once again, Prowl breaks it. “When this is over, we’re going to have the conversation you *really* want to have.”

Jazz doesn’t even pretend to misunderstand. “Ya mean when Shockwave is dead or the war is over?”

Prowl offers a smile he’s not particularly feeling. “Shockwave. We both know that for mechs like us, this war will probably never be over.”

“Yeah, yer right.” Jazz sighs. “Let’s just kill this bastard, shall we? Then we’ll worry about everythin’ else.”

“Deal.”

wheeljack's return

This is *not* a conversation Optimus is looking forward to.

Gunner walks beside him, clearly not pleased. “He’s not going to give Wheeljack up.” he says darkly. “Not without a damn good reason.”

“I think we can all agree that getting around that dampener so we can kill Shockwave is a damn good reason.” Prime says mildly. “The team just got out of medbay – I don’t think Ratchet wants to see them back in so soon.”

Gunner sighs. “No. And with the dampener, Hound and Mirage are useless. Even if Wheeljack does find a way around the dampener, it’ll probably still screw with their bond.”

“Which means they’ll have to stay outside until the dampener is destroyed.” Optimus agrees. “From Prowl’s report, it pulls a lot of energy from the lab. Destroying it will cause severe damage to the structure, no matter how they do it.”

“And announce their presence with a very big boom.” comes the dry response. “Lovely. We really need a method that involves subtlety.”

“It’s Jazz’s team, and Prowl’s planning the mission. Good luck with that.” Gunner just groans at Prime’s assessment. Prime continues. “At least everyone is out of the medbay. From what I’ve gathered, Blue and the Twins have been running interference for the rest of the team.”

“Yeah. Blue was the only one not injured, Bee close behind. Bee got Jumper and the rest of the minis on keeping everyone from bothering Hound and Mirage too much. Since they’re still on light duty, the minis have taken to relieving them of duty early when they can.” At Prime’s look, Gunner shrugs. “Hey, even the most stubborn mech has to admit he’s wrong sometime.”

“Smokescreen.”

“Yeah, well, Smokey’s a special kind of stupid.” Optimus punches him lightly in the arm. Gunner doesn’t even flinch as he continues. “Look, I know he’s gonna be your TO, but the mech ain’t the fastest circuit in the processor, now is he? Especially with the way he keeps heckling Jazz and Prowl.”

“Anyone ever tell you your accent comes out when you’re annoyed?” Prime wonders absently. “That explains why the Twins are pranking him again.”

“The Twins actually *like* ops as opposed to just tolerate them.” Gunner reminds him. “And if that’s true, then I always have an accent. I’m eternally annoyed. Pretty sure it’s part of my personality programming now.” Optimus chuckles at that, and the two of them walk into the conference room. Ironhide is already there waiting on them, and the main vid screen has Ultra Magnus on it. Gunner scowls. “Efficient as ever.”

“I try. Who fragged you off? You sound a little like Jazz now.” Ironhide teases.

Optimus leaves them to it. “Hello, Magnus.”

“Prime. What do you need?”

Well, that solves the problem of easing into his request. “Wheeljack.”

Magnus resets his optics. *“You want my scientist?”*

Optimus shrugs. “You’re not using him. I’m sure you’ve gotten the reports by now about Shockwave and the mess we made of his lab.”

That earns him a snort. *“I have. I also know why Shockwave is suddenly a problem. You know, there’s a really simple way of solving this matter.”*

Optimus really wants to snap at him. It takes effort to keep the irritation out of his voice. “And what would that be?”

“Make Prowl install a new computer.”

That’s actually something Prime considered, but he knows better than to ask Prowl to do it. He has his suspicions about Prowl and his computer, and he’s not sure if he really wants to know if he’s right. “From what I understand, that’s a very elaborate set up that we probably don’t have time to deal with right now. Besides, I don’t like the idea of Shockwave operating in my backyard.”

“We have bigger things to worry about than Shockwave. Intel says Megatron may be planning something big.”

Ironhide loses patience. “Then let Starscream screw him out of it.” he snaps. “I’m more concerned about the mech that Megatron is actually

afraid of." Suddenly, he smirks. "Or is it because Jack has been requesting transfer to Prime's unit for almost as long as Chromia has?"

Magnus looks like he would like to punch Ironhide in the face. Optimus would actually pay good credits to see that happen. There's a reason Ironhide is SIC, and it's not because of his interpersonal skills. "This isn't about a transfer – yet. This is about our ops team needing Jack's expertise to get around a dampener. That's all."

The other mech scowls. *"I want him back as soon as you're done with him."*

Optimus offers a half-smile. "Of course. As soon as I'm done with him." With that he signs off.

Ironhide gives him a look. "Prime?"

"What? I said I would, as soon as I'm done with him." His smile turns positively cunning. "The science division may decide they need his expertise. You know, we wouldn't want to waste good, now would we?"

Gunner actually laughs at that. "Times like this, I can see Prowl in ya."

"I'll take that as a compliment." Prime says breezily. "Times like this, I can hear the Polyhex in you." He turns away from the monitors. "Come on. I think Ratchet would like to know that his bondmate is coming back to Iacon."

Ironhide grins. "They'll be able to hear the groaning in Syph."

"Yeah, until Jack actually gets here." Gunner chuckles. "Then he'll still groan and complain, but he'll be smiling while he does it."

Optimus just smiles to himself as they head down to the medbay. Either way, the next few months are going to be interesting.

past lives

Jazz isn't entirely thrilled with the way things are progressing.

Sure, his team is out of medbay – that's always a good thing. They survived the last mission, Mirage and Hound can now stand to be on opposite sides of the base again, his visor is fixed, and Prowl's doorwings are fully repaired. Wheeljack will be arriving within a few days to help with the dampener problem. Things really should be looking up.

Then Ultra Magnus sent him a message over his IDLink. And that just put him into such a good mood.

Prowl nudges him with his foot. "You're annoyed."

Jazz scowls at him. The mech is sitting at the foot of the berth while Jazz himself is at the head. Blaster is out on patrol. For once, they have the room to themselves. (Red Alert thinks he'll have their new quarters appropriately secured within the next few weeks. He's looking forward to having his entire team in one spot again.) "Ah'm always annoyed."

"You're not Gunner. What gives?"

"Magnus is comin' ta Iacon."

There's a moment of silence before Prowl snorts. "I'm sure Prime *loves* that. He's probably making sure Prime doesn't do something sneaky to keep Wheeljack here."

"Prime ain' got a leg ta stand on there."

"That depends on what Prime knows that we don't." Prowl reminds him. "But that's not the only thing that's got your wires in a bunch. Spill." Jazz hesitates. Prowl arches one optic ridge. "Well?"

"Ya ever gonna tell meh what happened ta ya?" he asks abruptly. "Ya know, why ya ain' afraid of Shockwave."

Prowl freezes. That's really not the question he was expecting. Slowly, he sets aside his datapad. "Why do you want to know? I've never been asked that."

"Not even by Prime?"

“I don’t think he ever wanted to know.”

Jazz shakes his helm. “Ah do. Ah want ya ta trust meh th’ way Ah trust ya. Ya ain’ gotta tell meh everythin’ if ya don’ wanna. Just . . . . something.” He flashes the other a weak grin. “Ah’ll share mah secret if ya share yers.”

Slowly, Prowl nods. “I told you my creators abandoned me to the enforcers. That – wasn’t exactly the truth. If I read the files right, I was taken from my creators as a sparkling. One of several thousand a cycle that go missing from the Praxian medical centers.”

Jazz can make that connection easily enough. Everyone knows that, while Praxus was the center of the arts, it also had a dark criminal side to it. “When th’ enforcers raided yer home, they saved ya, along wit everyone else that was gonna get sold to th’ highest bidder fer whatever reason.”

Prowl nods. “And these mechs have rather *brutal* ways of training you to do whatever you’re told. Their training didn’t take well with me. Use your imagination. I was only there for a few cycles – long enough to become a youngling, I guess – but they left an impression.”

There’s a moment of silence while Jazz processes that. Prowl watches him warily, and suddenly Jazz realizes why he never tells anyone this. Sharp black optics are watching him, looking for any sign that Jazz thinks *less* of him.

So, instead of saying anything else he could *(Ah’m sorry Ah asked; is that why ya chose ops?)* he simply shrugs and flashes Prowl a sharp grin. “Tha’ explains a lot. No wonder ya can’ take orders for shit.”

That startles a laugh out of Prowl. “Well, I never made *that* connection!”

Jazz grins and nudges him with his foot. “Now ya have.”

Prowl chuckles and nudges him back. “So, now you know my dark secret. What’s yours?”

Jazz almost feels like he’s cheating Prowl with this. “Ain’ as dark as yers, Ah’m afraid.” He smiles faintly. “Mah carrier was Polyhex, like meh. She died soon after I was sparked – Decepticon raid, before the war actually got goin’ good, ya know?” Prowl nods. “The docs were able ta save meh by transferring meh from my carrier to Magnus.”

“So Magnus became your sparker and your carrier.” Prowl muses. “That technology was pretty young back then. It’s a huge risk he took.”

Jazz actually laughs at that. "Nah, mech. See, ain’ him that took th’ risk. It was th’ medic. Magnus was in shock cuz of th’ shatterin’ of th’ bond, right? So while he was out, th’ medic transferred mah spark. Told him what happened after he woke up.” He shrugs. “Magnus wasn’t pleased, but he let it go. Nothin’ he could do about it witout killin’ meh. Although his spark kept tryin’ ta absorb mine.”

For a long moment, Prowl doesn’t speak. He just examines Jazz. “They had to transfer you into a frame before you were ready. That’s why you’re small compared to everyone else.”

“Yeppers.”

“You would think that, all things considered, Magnus would be overly protective of you.”

“Don’ think Magnus ever actually wanted a second sparklin’.” Jazz admits. “Sentinel Prime is mah older brother.”

“Primus above. I am so sorry.”

It’s Jazz’s turn for a startled laugh. “Ah know, right? Somethin’ went wrong wit that one’s personality files.”

“Only something? Pretty sure he’s a bigger psychopath than I am.”

Jazz nudges him again, a little more forcibly this time. “Ya ain’ a psychopath.”

Prowl smirks. “I know at least one psychologist that would disagree with you.”

“Let him. He can bite mah shiny metal ass.”

That earns him another snort of laughter, and suddenly the two of them are laughing like maniacs, laughing so hard coolant leaks from their optics. Prowl finally manages to regain control of himself. “Bite you – *where* did you get that?!”

Jazz grins. “Ah made it up, cuz Ah’m awesome that way.”

“More like insane.”

“Like Ah said – awesome.”

Blaster chooses that moment to walk into the room. “Um – what did I just miss?”

“Jazz is insane.” Prowl says with a cheeky grin.

Blaster, to his credit, just rolls with it. “Bravo. I figured that out when I first started rooming with him.”

That sets Prowl off again. Jazz watches him, still chucking and now harassing Blaster, and he has to smile.

Looks like everything is right in his world after all.

teaming up

Chapter Notes

> I feel bad for leaving y'all hanging for so long while I was busy getting my shit straight, so now that all the RL stuff is taken care of, expect multiple updates this weekend as an apology. Can't say it won't happen again.

Deadshot isn't certain what he was expecting after having been left in the cells for so long, but it's not for Prowl and Red Alert to come find him again. He forces an easy smile. "Forget about me?"

"Hardly." Red Alert says dryly. "Just trying to find the best use for you."

Any other mech might take insult to this, but Deadshot has known Prowl and Red for centuries now. Red Alert has always been utilitarian in his approach to other mechs, Prowl ruthlessly cunning. He merely shrugs and approaches the bars of his cell. "Come to a conclusion, I'm guessing?"

"Of course." Prowl keys in a code, and the bars vanish. "Time for your miraculous escape."

That earns them a look. "To do what?"

"Megatron is on the move, as is Shockwave." Red says. "We need you to find out where and why."

"So, I escape to be your spy?"

Prowl smirks. "You've always been good at disappearing in plain sight. I'm sure you won't have a problem getting what we need, and not getting caught."

"You have me there." Deadshot considers the two of them. Finally, he smirks. "When do I start?"

"Right now."

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It doesn't take very long for Deadshot to get what he needs. It's insultingly easy to bullshit some random excuse to Megatron about

where he's been for almost a month (seriously, how did he *manage* to get enough followers to even start a war again?), but he knows Starscream is watching him. Trying to get his information back to Prowl is going to be difficult.

Turns out, not quite as difficult as he thinks. All he has to do is pay off Skywarp, and Starscream is kept busy for the rest of the night. Deadshot decides he's probably better served not knowing how Warp pulled *that* off.

It's a very familiar club, out in Tyger Pax. It's not uncommon to see Decepticon and Autobot here, sharing drinks and basically pretending that the war isn't actually going on. Ever since the attack on the Tyger Pax base, it's gotten a little rarer, but not so rare as to draw attention. Besides, Deadshot isn't the only one that's good at disappearing in plain sight.

Prowl leans against the wall by his side. "So – what did you find?"

Deadshot grimaces. "You're about to have a hell of a time of it. Megatron has his sights set on a simultaneous attack."

"I'm guessing Iacon is a primary target."

"Yep. Iacon, Syph, and Kalis."

That gets him a sharp look from Prowl. "Syph isn't a base. It's a Neutral establishment."

"Megatron isn't allowing Neutrals anymore. If you're not a 'Con, you're a 'Bot. That's all he sees now." Deadshot shakes his helm. "This isn't what I signed up for."

"What do you mean?"

"When I decided to follow Megatron, I thought we were gonna make Cybertron better. Not start a war like this. I mean, I don't care about the fighting, but my opponent is only the mech who's directly standing against me. Not the mech who wants nothing to do with this stupid little war." Deadshot sighs. "Attacking mechs who are trying to stay out of it is terrorism."

Prowl arches an optic ridge. "You're just now coming to this conclusion?"

"Yeah, shut up. I'm slow."

“No, you were deliberately ignorant. The Decepticons started off as terrorists. Now they have a following, so they’re an army. But their tactics haven’t changed. You just can’t ignore it anymore.” Prowl pushes off the wall and starts to walk away. Deadshot’s voice stops him.

“Shockwave hasn’t given up. The attack on Iacon is mostly a distraction, to keep you guys from realizing that Shockwave is targeting your team.”

Prowl casts him a faintly amused look. “I figured that one. It would be pretty stupid for Shockwave to pass up that opportunity, and Shockwave is not stupid.”

“Confident of you.”

“My team is not the best for nothing.” He flashes Deadshot a grin. “We’ll be fine.”

Deadshot’s optics narrow. “I should also mention that I hacked Shockwave’s personal terminal. He’s been looking up old Enforcer records from Praxus.” Now *that* gets Prowl’s attention. The mech freezes, expression going blank even as his optics darken. Deadshot nods. “Yeah. Do I even want to know what he’s looking for?”

“Nothing he’s going to find.”

“So something Jazz already knows.”

“You always keep coming back to Jazz. Are you jealous?”

That earns him a shrug. “Maybe. You’re more open with him than you ever were with me. Or Red. I just can’t figure out if it’s a matter of trust or something else.”

There’s a long pause as Prowl considers that. “Some of it is trust. Most of it is something else. He wanted to know me, and he kept trying to, even when I pushed him away. So instead I let him in.”

“Shockwave will use that against you. Both of you.”

“He can try. We’ve gone against Magnus and Optimus to keep our team together. Shockwave doesn’t scare me.” Prowl starts to walk away, but Deadshot stops him once again.

“Iacon, Syph, Kalis. How do you plan on fighting that?”

Prowl flashes him a smirk. “It’s a good thing we aren’t the only ops team Prime has.”

This time Deadshot lets him leave. With a small sigh, he shakes his helm. “Shockwave really should scare you, Prowl. He has a way of resurrecting old ghosts.”

FUBAR

Red Alert has to admit – this is pretty messed up, even for them.

Prowl, Jazz, Red, Optimus, Ironhide, and Gunner all stand in the conference room. It's been completely locked down, and nothing short of a Decepticon raid is going to unlock this room. Considering what's about to happen, Red Alert doesn't really think they have to worry about that.

"How accurate is Deadshot's information?" Optimus asks.

"Extremely." Prowl says dryly. "Deadshot isn't in the habit of lying to me, and Red's intelligence confirms the targets he's given me. Iacon is about to undergo a double attack; Kalis and Syph will be attacked at the same time. Our forces would be spread too thin to defend all the cities."

Jazz grins. "Would be, if we didn' already know about it."

Gunner nods. "We're going to need to bring in the other teams. At least three of them."

"Only three. We got Shockwave." Jazz says flatly. "Git Sunbright's team on Iacon. They'll defend it as well as we can."

Prowl nods. "Moonracer should be on Syph. Her team has contacts with the Neutrals. They'll be able to prevent too many casualties."

"And Stormflare should be on Kalis." Gunner muses. "His team are natives, they'll be able to blend in without raising an alarm."

"Do we think they're after the reactors in Kalis?" Optimus asks, optics flickering between the three ops mechs. Red Alert shrugs.

"Not according to my intel, but I wouldn't put it past them." he says. "Even if that's not their ultimate goal, the Decepticons might just try to blow them as a last resort. The team should be aware of the possibility of that threat, at least."

"Then we'll probably need to evacuate Kalis of civilians." Ironhide muses.

"And Iacon." Prowl comments.

“An’ we need ta do it quietly, so th’ ‘Cons don’ know we know what’s up.” Jazz adds. Optimus nods agreement.

For a moment, the group falls silent. Finally, Optimus breaks it.

“We’re going to need help with the evacuations.” He turns his attention to Ironhide. “Use your contacts with the Enforcers. Impress the need for this to happen as quietly as possible. The last thing we need is a mass panic.” Ironhide nods sharply. Optimus turns to Gunner. “Get the other teams here. Only the leaders and maybe the tac. If the Decepticons pick up that we’re gathering ops teams, they’re going to know faster than an evacuation.” Gunner nods assent. To Red Alert, Optimus adds, “Keep on your intel officers. If anything changes, bring it directly to me, Jazz, or Prowl.” Finally, he turns his attention to Jazz and Prowl.

“Get the team ready. Any training, any drills you need to run, any mechs you need to use – do it.”

“Permission to use Blaster.” Prowl asks immediately.

“Granted. The Twins, too, if you need them. Just not Chromia, we’re going to need her help with the evacuations.” Jazz and Prowl nod. Optimus surveys his group one last time.

“All right, mechs – let’s get to work.”

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“Wait – the ‘Cons are doing *what*?”

The team has gathered in their new shared quarters. When Blaster realized there was one more berth than needed in here, he had smiled to himself. Now he’s perched on that extra berth, staring intently at Prowl and Jazz as they lay out what’s about to happen to the team.

Blaster raises a hand. “I’m with Mirage on this one. Seriously, is Megatron *insane*? Does he even have the mech power to pull this off?”

“Red’s intel says he’s usin’ drones fer most of it.” Jazz confirms. “Which, o’ course, means Hound here is at a slight disadvantage.”

“I can fix that.” Hound muses. “There are programs I can install specifically designed to make tracking drones easier.”

“None of it legal, I might add.” Mirage counters with a grin.

“Always better to ask forgiveness than permission.” Prowl comments. “Go for it. Dig however deep you need to.” Hound nods and pulls out a data pad, no doubt already reaching out to his contacts. Bee picks up the conversation.

“We still have the problem of the other teams.”

Bluestreak blinks. “The other teams will be a problem?”

“Yeah. You don’t get to be the best without stepping on a few pedes.” Bee flashes him a grin. “They’ll have a problem with you, because you’re so young. They’ll have a problem with Prowl because he’s Prowl.”

“But Prowl’s the best!” Blue protests.

Blaster grins. “Take it from me, Blue – that’s more than enough reason to hate someone. Can’t tell you how much shit I get from the other comms mechs for the same reason.”

“We all catch shit fer that reason.” Jazz laughs. “That’s why we’re all on th’ same team.”

Prowl keeps silent and lets the team discuss the new turn of events. He’s a little more concerned with the rest of what Deadshot told him. He never mentioned to Jazz that Shockwave was digging into the old records. There’s nothing in those records that he could use against the team, but there might be things in there that he could use against Prowl personally.

He actually remembers a fair amount of his sparkling days. He remembers more than anyone thinks he should about the hell the traders put him through.

It might be time to look through those files again. The last thing Prowl wants is that kind of information in enemy hands.

preparations

Gunner manages to get the ops leaders and tac to Iacon at roughly the same time Magnus and Wheeljack make it to the base. Thankfully for everyone involved, the current situation keeps Magnus and Jazz from immediately butting heads. In fact, Jazz isn't even aware that Magnus is on base.

Yet.

The tac room has been commandeered by the ops teams. Jazz stands next to Prowl, who is currently sitting on top of his desk and surveying the group they're going to be working with. Jazz knows them personally, Prowl by reputation only (except for Sunbright). Sunbright stands by the door with her tac, another Polyhexian called Livewire. Moonracer and her tac, a mini called Jinx, stand to the other side of the room. Directly across from Prowl stands the two Kalis mechs, Stormflare and Ion.

Prowl isn't worried about Sunbright and Livewire. He's worked with them a couple of times before. Moonracer and Jinx will follow Sunbright's lead, and more importantly, they know Jazz and his reputation. It's Stormflare and Ion that he's concerned about.

The last thing they need is a power struggle.

Jazz grins humorlessly at the group. "Well, mechs – Ah'm sure Gunner told ya what's up. Looks like we got our work cut out fer us."

"More like yer team's gonna be up shit creek without a paddle." Livewire teases. "Ya sure ya ain' gonna need th' help with Shockwave?"

"Hardly." Prowl says with a small smirk. "Shockwave is determined to make this personal, so we're going to make him regret it."

"Should be interesting, watching you run tac without a computer." Ion comments dryly. Sunbright throws a datapad and hits him in the helm with it.

"Frag off. Not like it's any big secret he's never used one, so stop acting like this is news." She returns her attention to Jazz and Prowl. "So we're basically flying on our own, right? We don't need to coordinate at all?"

“We’ll probably need some cooperation in there somewhere.” Prowl admits. “Someone’s mission is bound to go to hell in a handbasket, but until we get going, I don’t know who or when.”

“And with you wrapped up in your own mission, you won’t be able to run tac for any team that runs into trouble.” Jinx says. Prowl nods assent. “So, we’re going to need someone who can coordinate with us to get us the help we need when shit goes sideways.”

“An’ sadly, tha’ mech is gonna be Firestar.” Jazz says sourly. “Smokescreen’s got his own fight ta deal wit, an’ Firestar’s th’ only mech who’s got ops trainin’.”

“I thought Firestar left ops after Prowl took his place?” Jinx points out.

“He did. Gunner’s asking for him back.” Stormflare says dryly. “Makes me feel warm and fuzzy knowing the mech that almost got Jazz’s team killed is going to be the one to save our asses.”

“He’ll be running off of my simulations.” Prowl says mildly. “Between that and his own battle computer, his response time should be much better now.”

“Have ya managed ta plan fer every possible way a mission c’n go wrong?” Livewire asks. Prowl shrugs.

“No, but almost. A few more missions shot to hell, and I should have the complete set.”

That earns him a snort of laughter from Livewire and Jinx. Ion scowls. “And just how do you plan on getting past the dampener?” he demands. “Last I checked, you fried your doorwings.”

Jazz grins. “Ah got th’ schematics from Shockwave. Jackin’ works both ways, an’ wit mah firewalls, Ah don’ gotta worry about tryin’ ta keep him out.”

“So that explains Wheeljack’s presence.” Sunbright muses. “But why is Magnus here? Doesn’t he still have his own outfit to run?”

Jazz freezes. “Magnus finally arrived, did he?” He casts Prowl a sharp look, but the Praxian merely shrugs. Jazz nods. “Ah’ll be right back, mah mechs. Don’ kill each other.”

“We’ll keep it to a light maiming.” Prowl says easily. Jazz flashes him

a humorless grin and leaves the room. Ion turns his attention to Prowl.

“So, now that we’re all on the same page, where do we go from here?”

“First things first. We need to get all the intel Red Alert has on our respective missions. Hopefully, with all three of us planning out all three missions, we won’t have anything major go wrong.”

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Jazz finds Magnus in Prime’s office. Optimus isn’t there. Jazz is oddly grateful for that. He’s actually come to respect Prime, and he really doesn’t want him to see this confrontation.

Magnus turns his attention from the desk as Jazz steps in behind him. “About time you realized I’m here. You’re slipping.”

“Ya only wish Ah was slippin’.” Jazz mutters. “Why ya here?”

“I’m not allowed to check in on my son?”

“If Ah thought that’s what yer doin’. Ah know it ain’.” Jazz crosses his arms over his chassis. “Ya haven’ checked in on us since Prime took th’ team. So ya ain’ concerned. What gives?”

Magnus vents in frustration. “Wheeljack put in for a transfer.”

“So? Ain’ mah problem.”

“Sunbright’s team did, too. The entire team.” Magnus locks him with an even stare. “I don’t need to tell you what losing two ops teams would do to my standing. It’s been rather precarious as it is, ever since you left.”

Jazz really doesn’t need Magnus to tell him that. He’s been kept in the loop by Sunbright. Still, the transfer is news to him. “What does that matter ta meh?”

“You can convince her to stay.”

Jazz snorts. “Right. Convincin’ Sunbright to stay is like tryin’ ta make Prowler stay. That’ll happen.”

“Nice to know Prowl is just as insubordinate with Optimus as he was with me.”

“Don’ change th’ subject.” Jazz growls. “Why is Sunbright requestin’ a

transfer?"

Magnus shakes his helm. "I honestly don't know. I was hoping you could find out. I'm not kidding about the consequences of losing two teams." He leans against the desk with a sigh. "I heard you got a new team member. A youngling."

"Blue ain' a youglin' anymore."

"Still younger than most. And you made him ops."

"Ain' like he didn' want it. Besides, Optimus signed off on it."

Magnus laughs harshly. "Optimus is a fool. I'm surprised Gunner's managed to keep you all alive under Optimus."

Jazz refrains from mouthing off like he really wants to do. He's pretty much gotten the feel for what Magnus is up to, and it's about what he expected. Briefly, he wonders if he should mouth off, just a little – just enough to let Magnus know that he's aware the other is there to dig up dirt on Prime. In the end, he decides to keep that tidbit to himself.

It's always better to be underestimated than overestimated.

"Frag off, Magnus. Ah ain' got time ta deal wit you." With that, he turns and leaves the office.

One problem at a time. First, Shockwave. Then Ultra Magnus.

even more problems

Chapter Notes

> Did you guys miss me? Can you tell I can't keep an update schedule to save my life?

Optimus thinks things are going rather well. Prowl is with the tac officers, hammering out their battle plans. Jazz and the other leaders are down with Wheeljack in the labs, getting their weaponry upgraded and helping create the disruptors to counteract Shockwave's dampener. As for the rest of Jazz's team, Optimus doesn't particularly want to know what they're up to. He asked Prowl, who just smirked at him without replying.

Still, he has his own part of this mess to deal with – namely coordinating with Ironhide and the Enforcers to get Iacon and Kalis evacuated. He's examining the reports when Magnus walks in.

"I need to discuss something with you."

Optimus doesn't even look up. The shelters are requesting a few soldiers be made available to keep the civilians from panicking. He signs off on the request and makes a mental note to assign the Wreckers to the task. "Make it quick; Ironhide is keeping me busy."

"When this is over, I'm taking my team back."

Optimus pauses. He vents hard before setting aside the datapad and looking up at Magnus. "Have you discussed this with Jazz?"

"No. This is not up for debate. I'm expecting you to order it."

And this is why Optimus prefers to keep Magnus as far away from Iacon as possible. "Last I checked, Gunner has not recommended that they be transferred again. In fact, the team appears to be thriving here in Iacon. So why would I authorize that?"

Magnus looks like he found a sour rust stick. "You don't even like ops. Why would you want to keep the team?"

Optimus actually snorts at that. "Goes to show how much attention you've been paying. Gunner trained me to use them properly. I find I rather enjoy having them around. They keep things entertaining."

“Last I checked, Jazz’s version of *entertainment* involves hiding body parts in other mechs’ quarters.”

That earns Magnus his first real laughter from Optimus. “I can now tell Smokescreen that it could be worse. At least he hasn’t done *that* to the poor mech, and I swear he’s trying to drive my TO into early retirement.” Optimus leans forward and pins Magnus with a look. “So, what is this actually about?”

Magnus clenches his fists. He looks like he wants to take a swing, but Prime is fairly certain he’s not that stupid.

Before either of them can do anything, the door slides open and Prowl walks in. He arches an optic ridge. “Am I interrupting something?”

“I think Magnus was just leaving.” Prime says.

“We’ll continue this later.” Magnus says tightly before turning and walking out of the office. Prowl watches him go with undisguised suspicion.

“I really don’t like him.”

“Of course you don’t. He doesn’t like you.”

Prowl shakes his helm. “No. I don’t like that he’s here. There’s something he’s trying to accomplish, Jazz probably knows what it is, but he won’t tell me.” He considers for a moment, then shakes his helm again. “Never mind. I wanted to let you know that we’re ready. Plans have been hatched, teams are prepped, and all we’re waiting on is Firestar to arrive.”

Optimus nods. “Good. What’s our chances of everything going to hell via the express route?”

Prowl smirks. “You really don’t want that answer.”

“That doesn’t instill me with confidence.” Optimus points out dryly. He leans back in his seat and sighs. “I’m not looking forward to this. I’ve gotten used to your team, and I know how you operate. I don’t know Sunbright, Moonracer, or Stormflare, and I don’t like having them involved.”

Prowl sighs. “Sunbright won’t be an issue. If my team is the best, then her team is the second-best. And they’re only half as crazy as we are, so they might get along better with Smokey. I’m not sure about

Stormflare. I haven't worked with him at all, and as far as I can tell, he has no respect for Jazz. Which means I can't get a good read on how he'll react to following my orders. Moonracer will follow Jazz's lead, which means she'll also follow my lead." He shrugs. "I'm not a fan of Firestar being involved."

"Do you think he'll cause you problems? You took his place."

"I think he would have quit after that mission anyway. But no, I don't anticipate personal issues. I'm anticipating him locking up again and getting one of the teams killed."

"That's a lovely thought." Optimus takes a moment to examine Prowl's posture. His arms are crossed over his chassis, fists clenched, and most telling, his doorwings are almost completely still. Despite his calm tone, he's stressed and worried, his optics dark but not quite black, and Optimus decides not to tell him about Magnus. Prowl has more important things to worry about.

"How are you holding up?" His tone has changed, no longer a commander but a father, and Prowl flashes him a small smile.

"If the strain of waiting for Megatron to make his move doesn't get me, my team is going to drive me insane." he says lightly. "Blaster sacrificed his quarters to Mirage and Hound for the duration, so he's staying in the team quarters."

"Why did he – actually, no. Don't answer that, that's a stupid question, and I don't want to be scarred for life." Prowl laughs at that. Optimus smiles.

Point to him.

Prowl flashes him a grin. "I should probably head out. I can only imagine the hell Magnus is about to raise."

"Primus. Why is Magnus about to raise hell?"

"Because the Twins picked up on the fact that Jazz doesn't like him."

"Another prank war."

"Something like that." Prowl turns to leave. Prime's voice stops him.

"You know, despite the fact that this is not where I wanted you to be – I find it suits you well. This is the happiest I've seen you."

Prowl doesn't exactly smile, but his expression relaxes, and his optics fade back to blue. "I appreciate that. I think this team is exactly what I've been looking for."

"Good." Optimus makes a shooing motion. "Now go. Find your team, go play. Keep Jazz from completely torturing Smokescreen."

"But Smokescreen is so easy to torture!"

"Go!" Optimus laughs as Prowl leaves. Slowly, he looks back down at his report, not really seeing it anymore.

No, he's keeping the team. This is the most of Prowl he's ever gotten – he can't lose that now.

missing out

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is really short, I'm sorry. Next chapter should be up on Friday.

Wheeljack has to admit, he's glad to be back on Iacon. Even if it is for really shitty reasons.

He likes ops. Especially Jazz's team. He's always enjoyed working with Jazz. The Polyhexian is the only mech crazy enough to test his weapon inventions in the field. He's never really approved of the way Magnus uses Jazz's team, especially once Prowl joined, but he's just a scientist. Magnus isn't well known for accepting the opinions of his subordinates.

He really missed Ratchet. He knows Ratchet missed him, even if the ornery medic won't admit to it. Wheeljack can feel it in their bond.

Which brings his thoughts back to Jazz and Prowl as he works on counteracting the dampener.

It's not a secret to Wheeljack that Mirage and Hound are bonded. He overheard Magnus chew them out not too long afterwards. He knows that there are other bonded mechs in the ops teams. Since there's no longer the threat of Magnus separating them, he wonders dimly why Jazz hasn't bonded to Prowl yet. It's not like he's ever considered Magnus in his decisions before.

The door to the science lab swings open and the Twins rush in. Wheeljack smiles at them affectionately. "What are you two up to this time?"

Sunny grins at him. "If anyone asks, we've been down here with you all day."

Jack groans. "Okay, who are you pranking?"

Sides just smirks. "Oh, we figured Ultra Magnus could use a good old-fashioned Iacon welcoming party!"

An Iacon welcoming party means liberal use of trip wires, hidden paint bombs, and bolting the berth to the ceiling – with the unfortunate mech still in it, if possible. Jack should really reprimand

them for pulling those tricks on a superior officer, but well, he just can't.

Instead, he laughs. "What stage have you gotten him to?"

"Paranoid enough to start sending other mechs around corners before him." Sunny laughs. "The minis are really good at not disturbing the traps, so they've taken to volunteering. Then Magnus sets them off anyway."

He chuckles. "Still the pranksters you always were." he says affectionately. When Ratchet first told him about the Twins, he'd been a little apprehensive. Then he'd met them. Such small things, aggressively protective of each other, and Jack had fallen in love. "So what did Magnus do to earn this?"

The Twins exchange looks. "Jazz doesn't like him." Sides says bluntly.

"But for some reason, he doesn't just make him go away." Sunny continues.

"So we figured we'd prank the hell out of Magnus for him." Sides finishes.

Wheeljack takes a moment to process that. "Did Jazz ask you to?"

"No."

Wheeljack stares at them. "I'm surprised. You don't normally prank for someone else unless they ask." He tilts his head to the side, fins flashing in amusement. "What brought this on?"

Sides and Sunny exchange looks. Sunny shrugs. "Jazz isn't scared of us. No one on ops is." he says bluntly. "And with the exception of you and Ratchet, that's *all the mechs* that aren't scared of us."

"So yeah, they don't really have to ask anymore." Sides finishes. Before Wheeljack can say anything about that, the door to the lab opens and Bluestreak walks in with a wide grin. "You two are gonna get your *asses kicked*." he says brightly.

The Twins exchange looks. "Why?"

"Because Prime just walked into one of your traps."

Wheeljack pinches the bridge of his nose while the Twins stare at Bluestreak in horrified amazement. Bluestreak grins. "If I were you, I'd

hide. Really, really well."

"Wait – which trap did he set off?" Sunny demands.

"The glitter bomb."

"Shit."

With that the two of them vanish. Bluestreak watches them go with amusement. "It's like a vapor trail." He turns his attention to Wheeljack. "Actually, Prowl sent me to get you. He says we're almost ready."

Wheeljack nods. "I'll be right there." Bluestreak offers that bright smile again and walks away. Wheeljack looks down at his work bench and sighs.

The Twins' affection for Bluestreak has never been a secret, and Wheeljack knows that affection is returned. And now the Twins are pranking for Jazz, without being asked, which is something they never do. And even though Blue is going to be up high, and quite possibly out of the immediate danger, there's still the risk that this time, that young Praxian will not come back.

What will happen to his Twins if Blue dies?

He shakes the thoughts away. There's work to be done.

countdown

Chapter Notes

> Well, I'm currently unemployed, so chapters should be coming a lot faster now. Hopefully I'll be able to get everything up by the end of February.

It's one last sit-rep. One last time making sure everyone knows their place.

Prowl can almost guarantee this is all pointless. He knows, deep inside his spark, that this mission will be one of those ones that goes to hell in the most spectacular fashion possible.

Still, there's nothing he can really do about it. That knowledge, though, is about to *drive him insane*.

Optimus stands by the door with Gunner. This really isn't their fight, after all. The team stands in the center of the tac room, surrounding a hologram map of Shockwave's base and the area around it. Jazz points out every area of interest, listing the various positions the team will take. Optimus assumes the other teams are having similar meetings.

"All righ', mechs, here's how it's gonna play out." Jazz says, drawing his attention away from his own thoughts. "Ah'm goin' in ta get rid of th' dampener. Wit th' way it sucks in power, it's gotta be here." He points to a spot on the map. "Prowler's gonna be goin' in wit meh."

"Mostly to make sure he has *time* to kill the dampener." Prowl says absently. That earns a round of nervous snickers from the team. Deadshot has fed them enough information that they know all about Shockwave's love of drones – and reformatting some of his victims to be his bodyguards.

Jazz shoots him a dirty look and continues. "Until the dampener is gone, no one else c'n come in. So, ya four are gonna place yerselves around th' base. Mirage an' Hound, yer gonna take th' south and east. Blue an' Bee, yer on th' north and west. Make sure no nasty surprises creep up on us. When th' dampener dies, Prowler will give ya th' signal. Mirage an' Hound are gonna come straight ta meh. Ah imagine all th' drones will come straight to th' explosion." Mirage and Hound nod. "Bee, yer takin' th' vents. If it looks important, break it." Bee grins. "An' Blue, yer on Prowl. Find him, git high if ya can, an' cover

him until we git there." Blue nods. Jazz straightens up and looks at the team. "Questions?"

Gunner speaks up. "Is it really wise to have Prowl on the inside?"

Optimus watches with interest as Prowl's fists clench, but the Praxian doesn't say anything. Mirage actually chuckles.

"Maybe not, but that's a fight Jazz lost before it even began." he says.

Prowl never takes his gaze from the map. "Hound and Mirage can't go in. That leaves myself, Bee, and Blue. Out of the three of us, I'm the one with both the least amount of specialized equipment and the most experience fighting in that kind of environment." He flicks his doorwings. "I'm the logical choice."

Bee offers a wry grin. "The bad part is, Jazz *can't* argue with that, because he's right. I have less specialization than Prowl does, but not the experience he has. Hence, Prowl's going, and I'm not."

Optimus can't help but notice just how *tense* Jazz gets at that. He really doesn't want Prowl in Shockwave's lair. Prowl is going, no matter what, and Prime thinks he knows why.

He wonders absently just how long those two think they can keep fooling each other, but dismisses the thought. If they haven't worked things out on their own by the time this mission is over with, he'll lock them in a supply closet or something.

"Are the other teams prepared as well?" he asks.

Prowl nods. "As prepared as we're getting. Firestar has direct access to all the tac officer's comms, so if anything goes to hell in a handbasket, we'll be able to contact him directly."

Hound snorts. "Yeah, like you're going to contact Firestar if shit goes sideways."

Prowl flashes him a smirk. "Only if we're forced to retreat."

"Which ain' really an option wit this one, is it?" Jazz muses. "C'mon, mechs – we head out at dark. Git what rest ya c'n." With that, the team disperses. Blue heads out to find the Twins. Mirage and Hound leave together, while Bee sets off to get some recharge. Neither Jazz nor Prowl leaves.

Optimus sighs. “Come on, Gunner – let’s go check on the other teams.” Gunner nods and follows Prime out of the tac room.

Jazz looks up at Prowl, only to find the other mech staring right back at him. “There’s somethin’ ya ain’ tellin’ meh.”

Prowl doesn’t bother to deny it. “Shockwave has been looking at old Enforcer records from Praxus.” he admits. “Deadshot informed me.”

Jazz’s fists clench. “And ya didn’ think Ah needed ta know this?”

“What could you have done?” Prowl spreads his hands helplessly. “There’s nothing in those records. I’ve checked. My designation is listed as one of the younglings rescued, but there’s nothing personal in there. No details of what went down, no information about what happened after. But if Shockwave was after those files, then he got *something* out of them, and damned if I can figure out what it was!”

He’s almost shouting by the end, and Jazz can only watch. He gives Prowl a moment to collect himself before speaking again.

“Ya thinkin’ ya might not git outta this one?”

His voice is a hell of a lot rougher than he would have liked, but Prowl merely smiles at him.

“Dying is not an option. We’re *all* coming home.”

For a long moment, the two simply stare at each other. Slowly, Jazz smiles. “Ya really believe that.”

“Of course I do. If I didn’t, I wouldn’t be letting us walk into this mess.” Prowl steps forward and puts his hand on Jazz’s shoulder. “Come on. I feel the training rooms calling our name.”

Jazz tilts his helm in question. “Sparring?”

Prowl grins. “Dancing.”

Jazz laughs, the last of his tension melting from his frame. “Can’t let ya go witout yer dancin’ partner, now can Ah?” he teases. “Lead th’ way, Prowler.”

Prowl guides him out of the tac room, a satisfied smile on his face.

No, dying is not an option.

live and let die

Chapter Notes

> And here it is, the start of the showdown everyone has been waiting for!

The team is in position. Prowl and Jazz flank the side door, weapons drawn. Bluestreak has found a position high, his scope allowing him to sight the door without being in the line of fire. This is the door all the drones use, according to Deadshot, so their entrance shouldn't trip any of Shockwave's alarms. Still, best to approach with caution.

::Okay, I'm locked on.:: Blue says. ::Breach when you're ready.::

Jazz glances at Prowl, who nods sharply. ::Got it. Breachin' now.:: He reaches across and punches in the access code Deadshot got them. The door slides open, but neither mech moves.

Blue switches his scope over to night vision to penetrate the darkness. ::Clear.::

Prowl nods. ::If this takes longer than 30 minutes, contact Firestar and get the hell out of here.:: he orders.

::Please. 20 minutes, tops.:: comes Blue's rather cheerful reply. Prowl can't help but grin at that.

::I like that thought. Here we go.::

The instant they enter the base and the door slides shut behind them, they lose contact with the team. Prowl can still feel his own spark pulse, can somewhat use his doorwings, but he can no longer sense Jazz beside him. It's unnerving.

Jazz automatically grabs his wrist. ::Still wit meh?::

::I got you.:: Prowl leans into Jazz for just a moment before pulling away. ::Looks like Jack's invention worked.::

::An' it didn' explode. It's a frellin' miracle.::

They ease their way down the hall. It's quiet, and that's more unnerving than the effects of the dampener. Jazz keeps his grip on Prowl's wrist until they reach the T junction. Here is where they split

up – Jazz to the left to take out the dampener, Prowl to the right to hunt down Shockwave. If Jazz wasn't thrilled with this plan before, he's even less thrilled now.

He turns to Prowl and finally lets go of his wrist. ::Ya die on meh, an' Ah'm gonna kill ya. Understand?::

Prowl flashes him a smirk. ::I'll be fine.::

Jazz nods sharply and takes off down the hall. Prowl watches him go before turning around and stalking off after his own prey.

Let Jazz be subtle. Prowl is going for shock and awe.

Which is why it doesn't surprise him to run into trouble as soon as he does.

He adjusts his grip on his swords and grins at the drones. "Only ten? Come on, I want a *challenge*." In a flash he's moving, swords glinting in the dim light, and it takes maybe a minute to decimate the drones. Prowl considers for a moment before continuing down the hall, completely disregarding the bodies.

At least he knows he's going in the right direction.

/-----/

Jazz runs into very little interference on his way to the dampener, and that makes him very nervous.

This really shouldn't be going this smoothly. If this was Jazz's place, he would have at least six different trip wires installed to let him know about someone trying to break in. He really should be getting jumped by drones left and right at the very least.

Either Prowl's being one hell of a distraction, or Shockwave is focusing all of his attention on the Praxian, and Jazz really doesn't like that last option.

He finds the dampener. There isn't any security on the door or in the room. The device itself is extremely easy to spot – even if it wasn't the biggest thing in the room, it's putting out enough heat to show up beautifully on his thermal scans.

This is a trap. It has to be.

Jazz groans. This is going to *suck*.

/------/

The instant Prowl steps into the last room down the hall, he knows he's in trouble. He can feel the electronic sensor sweep (and how in the hell Shockwave got *that* to work with the dampener is beyond him), and the charge builds in the air. He jumps forward and summersaults to the center just as a blast of phaser fire hits the open doorway. He rolls into a crouch –

and bites back a scream as something hot cuts across his left doorwing. He spins around, raising his swords to block the next blow.

It's not a drone. It's Shockwave, laser scalpel in hand and dripping energon. Prowl smirks. "Finally got tired of sending your minions after me?"

Shockwave seems to smile. "You are a better fighter than I gave you credit for." He takes a step back and begins to circle. Prowl matches him step for step.

He could continue the banter. He can continue to stall until Jazz arrives, or Blue. Honestly, that would be the tactical thing to do.

But he doesn't like that smile. He doesn't like the way Shockwave holds that scalpel, the way he's looking at Prowl like he's trying to decide how best to dissect him. He'd really rather not give Shockwave time to think about that.

He adjusts his hold on his swords. "Then bring it – and let me show you just how good I am."

/-----/

Jazz decides not to chance the glaringly obvious trap. He remembers the explosion Prowl caused taking out the dampener last time. Instead, he draws a knife and takes a few steps back. He can clearly see the shutoff switch from here. Hitting it will be a piece of cake.

Decision made, he throws the knife.

The resulting explosion knocks him back into the far wall of the hallway. It also takes out the power.

Good thing he can recover quickly.

::Team, mobilize! Prowler, we're comin' yer way!::

::Roger that.::

Prowl's voice is strained, and that worries Jazz more than anything. With a grunt, he takes off down the hall.

/-------/

Bluestreak finds Prowl first.

There's actually a walkway that goes around the room near the ceiling. Blue takes up position there, sniper rifle set up and aimed straight at Shockwave. He can't get a clear shot, and he won't risk accidentally hitting Prowl. The two are simply moving around too much.

Prowl's venting hard, sliced up but not bleeding. The laser scalpel has cauterized the wounds it's made, and it's all the more dangerous because of it. Shockwave isn't any better off, his armor covered in energon that's all his. Prowl's swords drip with it.

"Looks like your Polyhexian is dead." Shockwave says calmly. "No one could have survived that blast."

Prowl doesn't exactly smile, but it's close. "You clearly have never met Jazz. Something that simple isn't going to kill him."

Shockwave examines him a moment. "You truly are the oddest mech I've ever met. You just simply are not afraid of me."

This time Prowl does smile. He adjusts his swords and falls back into a fighting stance. "Hard to fear a dead mech."

"Brave words. If your team isn't already dead, they will be soon. I have far more drones than you've killed. You're on your own, tactician. Do you truly think you can kill me?"

From the door, Jazz's voice sounds loud, clear, and very, very angry.

"If he doesn', *Ah will.*"

live and let die, pt 2

Almost the instant they breach the base, the team runs into drones. Hundreds of them. Mirage takes over quickly. Jazz and Prowl have their own problems to worry about. ::Blue, go! We'll keep them off of you as much as we can. Bee, think you can still take the vents?::

::Oh yeah. I've got a clear shot on my side.::

::Kinda makes you wonder what kind of information Shockwave has that he thinks I'm a greater threat than Bee.:: Blue muses. ::I've got at least 20 of them over there.::

Hound curses under his breath. ::You gonna need help?::

::Ha. Please – Ironhide's sims are more challenging than this.::

Mirage's laughter rings over their bond to Hound, who smiles to himself. ::If that changes, don't play the hero here. Hole up somewhere and let us know you need help.::

::Don't worry about me. I'm gonna find Prowl.::

Privately, Hound worries, but there's only so much he can do. It's not that he thinks Blue is incapable – this is just a hell of a time to get experience in hand-to-hand combat. Then again, the youngling has always been resourceful.

And sure enough, as he fights his way through the mass of drones attempting to kill him, he hears Blue come back over the comms.

::Guys, I found Prowl. Jazz, you might want to hurry – I can't get a clear shot to help him out.::

::Roger.:: Jazz's voice is tight, stressed, and Hound can't really blame him. Aside from that first confirmation, they haven't heard from Prowl at all.

::I'm in the vents now.:: Bee says. ::If I can find where these guys are coming from, I'm gonna start dropping grenades on them. That'll learn 'em.::

::Don't risk yourself, Bee.:: Mirage warns. ::No heroics.::

::You are no fun whatsoever.::

Hound just shakes his helm as he continues to cut down drones. He just hopes Jazz gets to Prowl before their TO gets himself into too much trouble.

/------/

Shockwave slowly turns and looks at Jazz. He's a little singed, but otherwise unharmed. Jazz glances over at Prowl, taking in the damage. ::Ya alrigh'?::

::It looks worse than it is.:: Prowl never takes his gaze from Shockwave. Jazz decides not to call him on his lie. Instead he focuses his attention on Shockwave.

"Whaddya think? Care ta take us both on?"

Shockwave smiles. "Sure. Let's make this fun." With that he launches his attack, keeping the majority of his focus on Prowl. Jazz doesn't hesitate to take advantage of that and attack Shockwave's exposed back, using his daggers to attempt to scale the larger mech.

The instant his daggers pierce Shockwave's armor, an electric shock blows him off the larger mech's back and across the room. He skids to a stop, somehow managing to stay on his feet. Prowl's optics widen. "Jazz!"

"'m fine!" Jazz glares at Shockwave. "How th' hell did he manage that?!"

Shockwave just grins at them. "What? My specialty is modification. I experiment on other mechs, but I use the finished product on myself. Needless to say, I can guard my own back."

Jazz and Prowl exchange looks. ::This is going to suck.:: Prowl says quietly.

::Yer tellin' meh. Got any brilliant ideas?::

Prowl's optics flicker over the larger mech, taking in Shockwave's armor and factoring in this new addition. Slowly, a smirk spreads across his face. ::I have one, but it could kill us both.::

Jazz grins. ::Tha's how th' game is played. What should Ah do?::

Shockwave looks between the two. "Enough of this. Playtime is over."

Three almost simultaneous explosions rock the base. It's not

something Shockwave is expecting, and they take advantage of his distraction to attack. From above, Blue opens fire, not actively attempting to hit Shockwave but definitely helping to keep him in one spot. Jazz and Prowl move as one, blades aiming for joints instead of armor, cutting into sensitive energon lines and soft connective metals – the parts that don't conduct electricity quite as well. Jazz is still getting popped, but it's not painful enough to stop him. Prowl is keeping Shockwave sufficiently distracted from what Jazz is attempting with his back.

Prowl isn't getting zapped. Jazz is. Whatever Shockwave is using has to be directly attached to the plating back here, and it's probably hiding in the connective metals. Eventually, Jazz is going to find it, even if he has to cut off the plating itself to do it.

Jazz manages to catch him in the back of the neck. Shockwave manages to knock Prowl to the ground before spinning around and slicing through Jazz's chassis with his scalpel.

The cut itself isn't deep, but it manages to catch under his armor, tearing through energon lines and wiring with ease. He can't stop the cry of pain.

Prowl sees red.

The rest of the team arrive just in time to see Prowl lung forward and take off Shockwave's head with one clean slash of his swords.

Prowl doesn't even wait for the body to drop before he's right beside Jazz, hands on his shoulders as the pain rolls through the smaller mech's frame. "Jazz?" He can't quite keep the tremor from his voice.

Jazz flashes him a weak grin. "'m alrigh'. Hurts worse than it is."

"You are a damned liar." Prowl keeps a tight grip on his shoulder as he turns to the others. "We need to get him to Ratchet. It's not bleeding, and I don't know how bad the wound is."

Mirage nods. "Lead the way, Prowl."

Together, the group limps back to base. Hound stoops and picks up Shockwave's head as they pass. At Mirage's look, he shrugs and says, "For Jazz's collection."

From his position tucked tight against Prowl's side, Jazz chuckles. "Bring home a limb once an' ya never let meh ferget it."

“Three. Three times.” Mirage corrects dryly.

“They still all arms. Ah ain’ collectin’ heads.”

Prowl tightens his grip on Jazz’s arm. Despite his worry, despite his pain, he can’t help but smile.

No, dying was never an option.

song #3

Chapter Notes

> Behold, the chapter everyone has been waiting for! Also, this is where the story earns its M rating, for very mild sexual content (like, PG-13 level content. I don't consider this smut.) ALSO also, for maximum impact, you should listen to the hit Song #3 by Stone Sour while you read this.

The medbay is busy for the next three days.

While Jazz's team was mostly unharmed, the other teams didn't get quite so lucky. Stormflare lost his tac officer rather quickly into their mission. Eventually, Prowl is going to have to get that story out of him – somehow Firestar managed to keep their team alive and complete the mission, and Prowl's curious. Sunbright's team has the various scattering of minor wounds that always comes with an op. Livewire has been keeping Prowl entertained while he's stayed in the medbay. Moonracer has a few team members that were more seriously injured, but by far the most injured is Jazz.

The cut itself wasn't deep, but it was dangerously close to his fuel pump. Combine that with coolant entering his energon lines, and it's no surprise that Ratchet is keeping him sedated for the time being. Coolant contamination hurts like frelling hell, and being hooked up to the purge pump is no fun, either.

The third night finds Prowl alone with an unconscious Jazz. He leans against the wall, staring blankly out the window at the sky. His hands shake, and he clenches them into fists.

"Prowler."

His gaze snaps to Jazz. The Polyhexian is awake, slowly forcing himself to sit up. The wound has been sealed shut, the purge pump disconnected. All Jazz has to do now is recover his strength. He smiles. "Finally decided to wake up?"

"Shaddup." Jazz flashes him a grin. "Been keepin' watch th' whole time?"

"Blue helped out, too. Mostly when Ratchet threatened to sedate my ass if I didn't get *some* recharge."

Jazz chuckles. “How’s th’ team?”

“Fine. Minor scrapes, nothing that can’t be left to internal repairs. You were the worst out of all of us.” Prowl motions to his chassis. The scar is still visible – it probably will be for a long time. Prowl has his own collection of scars as well. “Came damn close to your fuel pump. I don’t think even that scalpel could have kept you from bleeding out.”

His voice shakes just a little, but it’s enough to get Jazz’s attention. “Prowler?”

Prowl sighs and comes to stand beside Jazz. He looks *tired*, and Jazz has to wonder exactly how much recharge he actually got. It couldn’t have been much. Frowning, Jazz leans forward. “Prowler. What’s wrong?”

Prowl seems to be debating something within himself. Jazz is patient. He can wait. He knows, if it’s important, Prowl will tell him.

“What makes you think I could survive your death any more than you could mine?”

The words come out before Prowl can stop them, but he can’t bring himself to regret them. He stands there next to Jazz, fists clenched by his side – *Primus knows what he’s going to do if he reaches out* – and he watches as Jazz’s visor brightens.

Don’ make meh watch ya die again. Ah don’ think Ah could survive that.

Jazz can’t breathe. Those black optics are locked onto him, waiting for a reaction, and Jazz *knows*. He can acknowledge it and let it go, or he can act on it.

The first is smarter. All of Jazz’s reasons for never actually *saying it* are still there, still very valid, but right now, with those optics locked onto him, Jazz can’t bring himself to care. So, he does what he does best.

He reaches forward, grabs Prowl by his shoulder strut, and jerks him to the berth.

Prowl manages to catch his balance before he can fall on top of Jazz, but the smaller mech’s grip pulls him down, and suddenly those warm lips are on his, and he finds he doesn’t really care much about his balance. He leans forward, pressing Jazz back into the berth, and isn’t quite surprised when Jazz bites at his lip. He opens his mouth, allowing Jazz’s glossa to come play with his.

Neither mech is entirely certain when the tone changes, but suddenly Jazz can taste the desperation, the fear, and he's hit with the dizzying realization that Prowl has loved him for as long as he has loved Prowl.

Jazz keeps one hand at the back of Prowl's helm, holding him into the kiss that's rapidly becoming anything but chaste, and his free hand begins tracing patterns across his doorwing. Fire ignites within him, his cooling systems rapidly kicking to life, and he breaks the kiss with a soft gasp. "Jazz – "

"Ya can' tell meh ya don' want it."

The look Prowl gives him is positively smoldering. "Hardly. But fragging each other senseless in the medbay is probably not the best idea."

Jazz's hand trails down Prowl's doorwing and finds the joint. Those deft fingers slide inside, and Prowl's body *weakens* under the fresh wave of heat. Jazz smiles. "Ah bet Ah c'n change yer mind."

"J-jazz – "

That stutter amps up Jazz's own desire, but he manages to hold it back. "If Mirage an' Hound c'n make it this far witout problems, Ah think we c'n do th' same." Prowl completely freezes at that. Jazz continues. Now that the words are coming, he can't freaking stop. "Ah want ya. Ah always have. Ya know this."

"I do." Prowl murmurs. Jazz's fingers are still inside the joint, sending small pulses of heat through his systems, but he's no longer actively trying to continue. This time, the choice is Prowl's. Acknowledge it and let it go, or act.

But he can't let it go. Not this time. It's been one close call too many, and the last thing he has ever wanted for his life is regrets.

There's a small part of his processor that's telling him this is too fast, but really, this is just the end of a very long fuse. They've been approaching this from day one.

"I don't want to hurt you."

Jazz smiles. "Ya won'. Ah c'n promise ya that. Ah ain' 100%, but Ah ain' gonna break, either."

Prowl takes a shuddering breath. "Okay."

“Okay?”

“Okay. Let’s do it.”

Jazz’s smile could have lit up Iacon. Prowl can’t help but smile back.

Then those fingers are moving again, Prowl’s back arching as wave after wave of heat rocks his systems. Jazz’s other hand is at his chassis, gently coaxing his chest plates open even as his own slide open. Prowl can see the damage done, the scars left behind from Ratchet’s surgery. Then Jazz is kissing him again, drawing his thoughts away and to the only thing that really matters now.

Their sparks align, and that is all that matters.

consequences of our actions, pt 2

Chapter Notes

> So, I finally got a new job! I start on Monday. So updates will once again be sporadic, but we're so close to the end here. I'll update again tomorrow, and I'll keep updating on weekends until it's done.

This time, the meeting consists only of Optimus, Gunner, Ironhide, and Ratchet, and this time it's not in a locked down conference room. It's just in Prime's office, the four of them sharing a cube of high grade as they unofficially compare notes. Ironhide grins. "It's gonna be a long time before Megatron causes us too much trouble." he says. "Between the teams and the army, I'm pretty sure we've decimated most of his force."

Gunner chuckles. "Red's intel does support that. Either way, Megatron's gone to ground. We've got mechs keeping an optic out, so when he does resurface, we'll know about it. But for now, he's quiet."

"Good." Optimus muses. "We can use the reprieve to get things back to normal in Iacon and Kalis." He turns his attention to Gunner. "What happened in Kalis, anyway? I haven't had time to read the report."

Gunner snorts. "Ion got taken out by a sniper. Stormflare had to use Firestar for his tac. Damn good thing no one else needed him."

"That actually worked?" Ratchet wonders. "Last I heard, Firestar got Jazz's old team killed."

Gunner flashes him a grin. "In Firestar's words – 'If batshit insane works for Prowl, I can make it work for me'. Apparently, he just didn't give his battle computer time to protest the plan and ran with it."

"His insanity is contagious." Ironhide mutters.

"If it's stupid but it works, it's not stupid." Gunner retorts gamely.

"Considering how few injuries came my way from the teams, I'm okay with insanity." Ratchet says easily. "Now we just need to know how to handle the Neutrals that Moonracer's team picked up."

"They'll only be here for a week or two, at most." Optimus says. "Just until Syph is secure again. Then they'll be heading home. Any mech

staying in Iacon cannot stay neutral. It just isn't working anymore."

"Which means Iacon is no longer a civilian instillation." Ironhide says dryly. "I mean, we can protect the few that we need to keep the city running, but other than that, if you're here, you're a 'Bot." Optimus nods agreement. Ironhide sighs. "Figures. There's a handful that have figured that out already. Some of the civilians that evacuated aren't coming back. They're finding neutral cities like Syph to join."

"Probably for the best." Gunner muses.

Silence falls on the group, and they drink their high-grade in peace. Distantly, Optimus wonders how long Magnus will allow this to last. Probably not much past tonight, if he has to guess. Come tomorrow morning he'll be back in Prime's office, demanding the team.

Optimus shrugs off the thought. He'll worry about it then. Tonight, he's enjoying the solid victory. There aren't too many of those in this war.

Ratchet's voice breaks him from his thoughts. "Next time you see Prowl, congratulate him on his bonding. Primus knows that's been a long time coming."

There's a solid 30 seconds of silence while the group processes that. Gunner starts laughing.

"Seriously? Prime, you didn't even have to lock them in a closet!"

Ironhide snorts. "I wanna watch someone try to lock Jazz in a closet."

Optimus leans back in his seat and smiles. "It's about time. When did this happen?"

"About three days after they got back from Shockwave's lair." Ratchet says with a shrug. "I came in to check on them in the morning, and they were both passed out on the berth. So I ran a few scans while they were still." He drinks the rest of his high-grade in one go. "I will say this, though – if I didn't know better, I'd say they've been bonded a hell of a lot longer than just two days. Their bond is solid."

"Prowl never did do anything by halves." Prime muses. "Figures he would do this just the same. How solid are we talking?"

"Like Hound and Mirage solid. It's a good thing they waited until after they decapitated Shockwave to do this, otherwise the dampener

probably would have killed them."

Now that sobers up the group. Ironhide considers this for a moment. "Should they still be running ops then?"

Gunner snorts. "You try telling them no. I've known Jazz for most of his life – mech was *sparked* for ops. You take that away from him, he's nothing. Considering how we got Prowl, I imagine he's the same." He tosses his cube into the trash and leans forward. "Listen – I think they've proven one thing over the centuries: they can handle themselves. And they wouldn't have bonded if they thought they would be a *liability* to each other. They've got this."

Optimus nods. "Gunner is right. I still need to harass Prowl about it. Can't let him get away with eloping on me."

That has the others laughing. Optimus lets them continue on, a small smile on his face.

Prowl and Jazz just gave him the perfect reason to tell Magnus to go to hell.

no rest for the wicked

Bluestreak, for one, is enjoying the peace.

It's been two weeks. The Neutrals are back in Syph (thank Primus for that), Megatron still hasn't come out from under ground just yet, the other ops teams are getting ready to leave, and life is starting to return to normal.

Well, as normal as things get, at any rate.

Prowl and Jazz haven't made their bonding public yet, but everyone on the team knows. Jazz isn't even trying to be subtle about his tendency towards physical contact, and Prowl just gives even fewer shits than he ever has.

In fact, right now Jazz is laying across the bench, helm in Prowl's lap, and the two of them are reviewing a datapad. They haven't said a word in the past five minutes, but judging from Prowl's doorwings, they *are* talking. Blue knows that, as a bond matures, the bonded mechs can use it to talk privately, versus a comm link that can be hacked. He just didn't know that it could be done this early in the relationship.

He glances over at the Twins, who are currently harassing Ironhide about something, and smiles to himself. Maybe someday he'll find out for himself.

"Jazz, let's go."

Blue's gaze snaps up. Ultra Magnus stands there, arms crossed over his chassis as he stares down at the table the ops team has commandeered. Jazz doesn't even flinch from his position using Prowl as a pillow.

"'m comfy. Ya got somethin' ta say, say it here."

That earns a few snickers from Hound and Mirage. Magnus casts them his customary glare before returning his attention to Jazz.

"I told Optimus that, after this mission, your team is coming back to Tyger Pax with me. I've waited long enough. Let's go."

Blue freezes. Go to Tyger Pax? His home has always been Iacon! He knows, intellectually, that Magnus can recall the team. He is head

over most of the ops teams, and he's good at using them. However, he also knows that there's a reason why the team wound up in Iacon, even though no one has ever told him what that reason was. He glances at the team, trying to judge how he should react to this.

Mirage actually rolls his optics. "Is this because Sunbright requested a transfer for her team?"

That gets Prowl's attention. "Sunbright? She wants her team to come to Iacon?"

"Yeah. No idea why, but I overheard her discussing it with her team." Mirage shrugs. "I'm all for it. They're a damn good team."

"Ah second that." Jazz says, still not moving from his position. Prowl casts him a curious look. Jazz merely shrugs. "What? Ah like her team. It'll be nice ta have someone competent watchin' over Iacon if we git called away."

"And you know that'll happen eventually." Bee comments.

So no one seems overly concerned about this. Blue decides to take his cue from everyone else, and relaxes a little bit. Even so, Magnus looks like he's about to blow a fuse.

"Jazz. Let's go. Now."

Prowl looks up from his datapad and gives Magnus a flat stare. "Will you please vent your insecurities at some other time? You're making Blue nervous and annoying the rest of us." From his lap, Jazz snickers.

Magnus isn't even remotely amused. "I don't care. Bluestreak is staying here, along with you. The rest of the team is coming with me. I'm ending this game, *right now.*"

Jazz is probably the only one that picks up on the subtle change in Magnus's tone. Prowl takes his cue from Jazz, shifting ever so slightly. Before either of them can act, Blue speaks up.

"Hey!" He leans forward, scowling a little. "Prowl and I are ops, too! We've *earned* our place on the team!" He starts to stand, maybe to continue his rant or command attention, but he never gets very far.

Magnus shoves him, knocking him off his chair and to the ground.

Optimus walks into the rec room just in time to see Blue hit the

ground with a grunt. Before he can even think, Prowl and Jazz are on their feet, Prowl putting himself between Magnus and Blue, Jazz with dagger drawn and aimed at Magnus's throat. The others rise to their feet as well. Mirage and Hound move to flank Jazz. Bee heads to Blue.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. He just caught me by surprise." Blue looks up at Jazz. "Probably not the best idea to gut him, Jazz."

"Ah ain' gonna gut 'im." Jazz snarls. "Ah'm gonna cut 'is throat."

Optimus decides now is probably a good time to announce his presence – especially since the Twins have noticed that something is wrong and are coming over to investigate. "Magnus. What the hell are you doing?"

"Taking back what's mine." There's an edge of steel in his voice, but Prime notices he's not taking a step forward. In fact, he's holding very still. Optimus can't help but grin at that. "We agreed, Prime."

"No. You demanded. I just let you vent and walk away. That's usually the best way to handle you." Optimus says mildly. He can see a brief flash of amusement cross Prowl's face. Turning his attention to Jazz, he adds, "You can stand down, now. The team isn't going anywhere."

"He hurt Blue."

Ah. So that's what triggered this. Optimus pinches the bridge of his nose. "Magnus, anyone ever tell you you're an idiot? Jazz, stand down. I'll take care of this."

Jazz's gaze flickers from Magnus to Blue and Prowl. Prowl's doorwings flick, and Jazz nods. He puts away his daggers. "Ya better, Prime. He ain' comin' after mah team again. Ta hell wit th' consequences."

Optimus nods and grabs Magnus by the arm. "Come on, let's go. We need to have a talk."

Magnus jerks his arm free. "No. I'm *done* talking. I'm *done* waiting for all of you to see reason. I'm the only one who knows how to properly use the ops teams, and *I'm taking them back.* There is nothing you can do to stop me!"

Optimus merely rolls his optics. "I'm Acting Prime. You keep

forgetting this."

Magnus snarls wordlessly and takes a swing, catching Optimus in the chin. Any thought Jazz has about lending Prime a hand is dashed with Prowl's quiet *oh shit.* The Praxian grabs Jazz's arm and pulls him back, the others falling back with him.

Jazz doesn't have the chance to ask. Magnus swings again, and this time Optimus blocks the blow. In one swift motion, he punches Magnus in the gut, doubling him over. He takes advantage by following up with a blow to the side of the helm. Magnus drops to the ground.

Mirage blinks. "Damn."

Ironhide appears beside Prime. "Need a hand?" he asks mildly.

"I could use the help getting him to the brig." Prime muses. "Comm Ratchet and have him meet us there." Ironhide nods. Together, the two mechs manage to get an unconscious Magnus over Ironhide's shoulder. Optimus turns his attention back to the rec room. All activity ceased in order to watch the confrontation. He smiles at them. "As you were." With that, he follows Ironhide out of the room.

Hound speaks first. "Holy crap. And I thought we were impressive."

"I don't understand why everyone is surprised by this." Prowl complains mildly. "I mean, he's freaking *Acting Prime*. He didn't get that position just because he can give a good speech."

"Yeah, but Prime's a diplomat." Bee points out.

"With a temper to rival mine." Prowl says just as pointedly. "Trust me, it wasn't unending patience that kept him from drop-kicking my ass back to the youth center. It was the fact that he could match me." He turns back to Blue, who's still sitting on the ground with Bee. "You okay?"

"Oh yeah. I just really wasn't expecting him to shove me." He smiles up at the team. "I gotta say, though, that was really epic."

That sets the team laughing. Prowl helps Blue to his feet. "Come on. I think we should go out tonight."

"Hell yeah!" Jazz cheers. "Think there's a club out there we *haven'* terrorized yet?"

“We’ll find it.” Prowl smiles at the group. “Let’s go. We have something to celebrate today.”

interlude

Optimus and Ironhide flank the door to the brig cell as Ratchet walks in. He takes one look at Magnus, who is currently awake and glaring daggers at everyone, and sighs. “Why do I get all the crappy patients?” he mutters. He turns his attention to Optimus. “Any damage?”

Prime tilts his helm, letting Ratchet take a look at his chin. “Nope. Didn’t even faze me.”

Ratchet nods. “Still, let me take care of that before you go traipsing off after this. If he’d gotten you on the other side of the chin as well, you’d be looking like Sentinel.” Ironhide actually chokes on his laughter. Ratchet just smirks at him and walks up to the cell. “You gonna punch me if I come in there and make sure you didn’t rupture anything?”

Magnus sneers at him. “Frag you.”

“No thanks. I have Wheeljack for that.” Ratchet slides the door open and steps inside. Magnus takes a step forward. Ironhide raises his weapon.

“Give me a damned good reason.”

“You wouldn’t. I outrank you.”

Ironhide shrugs. “Actually, I’m SIC. No, you really don’t. Hell, *Gunner* outranks you. The only one who you outrank would be Jazz, and frankly, that won’t be for long.”

Magnus actually freezes at that, which gives Ratchet the chance to run a medical scan on him. “What are you talking about?”

“You attacked the *Acting Prime*. The hell do you think is gonna happen after that? We’re gonna give you a hug, say it’s all right, and send you on your way?”

“We can always just sic Jazz’s team on him.” Ratchet mutters darkly. “You’re fine, Magnus. You need to hit him harder next time, Prime. Might actually beat some sense into him.”

Magnus glares at him as Ratchet leaves the cell, but he makes no move to leave. Ironhide still has his weapon out, and even though Optimus is leaning casually against the wall with his arms crossed

over his chassis, his posture is too much like Prowl's for Magnus to feel *safe*. Finally, Magnus just sighs and shutters his optics.

"So what happens now?"

"Well, the teams are mine." Optimus says easily. "Jazz, Sunbright – whoever else feels like coming to Iacon. I'll probably put Hot Rod in charge of the Tyger Pax base. His second is good enough to take over operations in Flinx for a while. You, obviously, are staying right here pending a formal trial."

Magnus stills. "You can't do that. Not without the Council's agreement."

"This is war. The Council's opinion hasn't mattered for quite some time, and it won't matter until after the war is over. Which, let's face it, is going to be a while." Optimus sighs and pushes himself off the wall. "You brought this on yourself, Magnus. The hell were you thinking?"

For a moment, Magnus doesn't look like he's going to respond. Finally, he sighs in frustration. "I lost enough status when you replaced Sentinel as Acting Prime. Then the war started. I thought, maybe, I could get that status back. Give Sentinel some of his reputation back." He casts a mild glare Prime's way. "Then Prowl showed up."

"Sentinel lost his own status when he started abusing his subordinates." Ironhide growls. "I took those testimonies myself. I know what he did to those mechs. There ain't nothing you can do to help him now. He's rotting in Kaon's pits where he belongs. Not even Megatron wanted him."

Optimus wonders, briefly, if Jazz was among Sentinel's victims – if the other Prime got his start abusing his own brother. He decides not to think about it. The last thing he needs is a reason to go down there and shoot the mech in the helm.

Magnus just shakes his helm. "You don't understand. No one did. Sentinel had to be strict. That's how he kept order." He gives Optimus a hard look. "You're too soft, Optimus. It's going to get you killed one day. Sentinel never had that weakness."

Optimus merely shrugs. "Eh, I can live with that. Not the worst thing I've ever been called." He turns to leave, motioning for Ironhide and Ratchet to follow him. Magnus calls out again before they can go.

“Better to die a useless hero than live to be a useful villain? Is that it?”

For a moment, Prime debates answering that. Instead, he simply leaves the brig.

Jazz waits for him just outside in the hall. Optimus waves for the others to continue. He waits until they’re alone to speak. “I figured you would be out with the team.” he says quietly.

Jazz grins. “Yeah, they waitin’ fer meh. Ah needed ta hear what he said.”

“And?”

“Can’ say Ah’m surprised. Magnus always was too ambitious fer his own good.” He pauses. “Sentinel never touched meh.”

Prime can’t help but relax at that. “I never would have asked.”

“Ah know. But ya woulda wondered.” He flashes Prime a small smile. “Yer too much like Prowl not ta. By th’ time Sentinel got that bad, Ah was already at th’ Academy. He couldn’ do shit ta meh. Didn’ know what was up until he was arrested.”

“None of us did. And then the stories just kept coming.” Optimus shakes his helm. “So, where are you going to terrorize this time?”

Jazz grins, recognizing a dropped subject when he hears one. “Eh, we’ll find a place. Hear there’s a new bar up in the drag.”

“Just don’t go doing anything I’ll have to hear about later.”

“Now where’s th’ fun in that?” Jazz laughs and walks off, leaving Prime standing there to watch him go.

The next morning, when he gets the report of a massive bar fight that happened on the drag, he just shakes his head and laughs helplessly.

Where’s the fun, indeed.

event horizon

Chapter Notes

> This is the beginning of the last arc, and I'm gonna be honest with you, I'm not happy with how things turned out. But it's on ff.net, and everyone liked it, so I'm keeping it in.

The summons from Blaster has Prowl, Jazz, and Optimus in the communications room. Optimus is the one to speak first. “What have you found?”

“Well, I know where Megatron is. Or more accurately, where he’s not.”

Prowl considers this. “Okay, so where is he not?”

“Here. Cybertron.”

Prowl, Jazz, and Optimus exchange looks. Prime breaks the silence. “Say what?”

Blaster shrugs. “Yeah, that was my reaction. Apparently about two days ago, Megatron took Starscream, Barricade, Deadshot, and a handful of others and simply left the damn planet. Soundwave is in control of things here for the time being.” he says darkly. “There’s been no stated reason as to why though.”

Jazz scowls. “Ah don’ like it. How do ya even know this?”

Blaster grins humorlessly. “Deadshot. Got off one last communication before they left planet. It just now got here though, because he set it to reroute through what feels like every single relay station on Cybertron.”

Prowl snorts. “Yeah, Deadshot never was good at subtlety.” he muses. He glances at Jazz. “What do you think?”

“Ah think it’s a trap.” Jazz says sourly. /And Ah still don’ know if we c’n trust Deadshot./ Despite the newness of their bond, they’ve learned how to wield it as well as Mirage and Hound. It surprises Prowl that they’ve mastered it with such ease – Jazz not so much. Prowl nods.

/I’m not certain of it myself./ he admits. /But there’s really only one

way to find out./

/Ah hate that yer right./

Prowl glances over at Prime. “The best way to find out is to go after them.” he says quietly. “Hound should be able to do it.” Jazz nods assent.

“We’re gonna have to start off th’ last place he was.” he says. “Which was probably Kaon.”

/---------/

Getting to Kaon is easy enough. While the team’s designations are well known throughout the Decepticon forces, their appearances are not. They’re able to walk around Kaon with a minimal amount of attention – or at least, the majority of the group is. Prowl and Bluestreak have to take the sneaky route around, which means staying out of Kaon until a plan has been formed.

Prowl keeps an eye out on the group using both his bond with Jazz and a spare scope. They’ve found a perch in one of the abandoned towers just outside Kaon that affords them a lovely view without being seen themselves. Blue grins at him.

“Looks kinda odd, seeing a scope with no rifle.” he teases.

Prowl flashes him a smirk. “It would look even more odd watching me miss with a scope like this. I can see the screws on Jazz’s visor with this thing.” Blue chuckles.

“I know we can’t be down there, but I don’t like it.” he admits after a moment.

“Trust me, I’m not fond of it either.” Prowl agrees. “On the other hand, we’d put them in even more danger if we were down there than we will by staying up here.” He frowns. /Jazz, on your six. Two mechs, daggers. Pretty sure they’re petty thieves./

/No worries, mech – Ah got ‘em./

Blue raises his rifle and takes a look. “Damn shame I can’t just take them out.”

That earns him a laugh from Prowl. “You would ruin Jazz’s fun.”

/Um, Prowler, Ah think we got a problem./

/More so than we already have?/

/Yeah. Hound's caught th' scent. They left from th' square. Scent's old and fadin' fast./

Prowl considers that. /How long do we have before Hound loses it altogether?/

There's a pause while Jazz consults with Hound. /Not long. We wait th' four days at least ta git back ta Iacon, git supplies, and git back here, it'll be gone. An' there's no tellin' if he'll be able ta pick it back up again outside th' atmosphere./

Prowl's lip curls as he considers that. Blue watches him. "What's wrong?"

"Our window of opportunity is going to close before we have a chance to get properly equipped." he says darkly. "And I really don't like the idea of hoping we can find a fully supplied transport."

Blue nods. "A rock and a hard place."

"Pretty much. And unfortunately, there's only one thing we can do."

Blue groans. "Yay. We're heading out tonight."

"Yep." /No choice for it, Jazz. We're leaving tonight. Gather what you can. Blue and I will find us a transport./

/Don' get caught./

/I am the epitome of stealth./

/Ha! Ah c'n name three ops at least that prove ya lie./

Despite himself, Prowl smiles. /We'll meet you in the square./ "Come on, Blue. Let's go find a transport."

it's a start

The sun has set by the time Jazz and the team make it back to the square. He's just about to contact Prowl and see what's keeping him when a transport vessel taxis into the square. This isn't an uncommon place for personal transports to take off, so they aren't drawing much attention. Jazz dimly wonders how Prowl pulled this off, then decides he doesn't want to know just yet. His mate is radiating an odd mixture of smugness and alarm. The entrance hatch opens, and the rest of the team quickly climbs aboard.

Prowl looks back from the pilot seat. "You got what we need?"

"We hope. We're gonna be on strict rations fer a while." Jazz admits. "Ah ain' likin' these odds, just from th' supplies."

"Well, hopefully when we find Megatron, one of the first things we can do is raid his supplies." Prowl replies dryly. "Add them to the stash. This thing already has a few days worth. Hopefully that will get us through this mess."

"An' th' fuel?"

Prowl flashes him a wry grin. "Not much."

"This thing has tiny fuel cells." Blue adds. "We could feasibly push it further if we use energon rations, but those are energon rations."

"Kinda need those to fuel ourselves." Mirage murmurs.

Hound snorts. "Talk about a shit mission."

Bee just shakes his head. "We've had worse. Still not as bad as having to walk through a minefield." There's a general murmur of consensus that has Prowl cracking up. Bee just grins. "Come on, let's get the hell out of here before Hound loses the scent."

Prowl swaps places with Hound, allowing him to input the tracking algorithm. "Once we clear the atmosphere, we need to send back a message to Prime." he says. "We've missed check in as it stands."

"Oh, he's not gonna be happy." Blue says almost absently. Prowl flashes him a humorless grin.

"That, my good friend, is putting it *mildly*."

It doesn't take long. They clear the atmosphere, and Prowl switches places with Hound. Jazz glances at the tracker while Prowl works on securing the connection. "How far ya think we got?"

Hound shrugs. "My guess is not far. His transport is only a little bigger than ours, meaning we'll make it to the same place, but we'll probably have to steal his fuel to get back." Jazz nods as Prime's face appears on the screen.

"I thought you were coming back to Iacon."

Prowl merely shrugs. "The scent was weak. If we came back, we would have lost the trail."

Prime pinches the bridge of his nose. *"And you didn't think that maybe I needed to know this?"*

That makes Prowl grin. "You do now."

Jazz smirks. /How abou' we *not* antagonize our boss, yeah?/ he teases.

Prowl's laughter rings across their bond. /May I be allowed to antagonize my creator?/

Prime's voice cuts across the private conversation. *"Dammit, Prowl. You never can do things by the book, can you?"*

"The book is for burning." Prowl comments. "In either case, we're going after Megatron. Hopefully he's not going so far away that we'll lose contact with you."

"I'll get Blaster on boosting your signal, as well as making it more secure. The last thing I want is Soundwave catching wind of this."

"Oh, Ah'm sure Megs ain' gonna need Soundwave ta let him know we're there." Jazz says with a smirk. "Only one tracker that c'n follow him through space."

"Aw, Jazz – you flatter me." Hound teases.

"Primus above. Don't get killed before I have a chance to properly chew you out." With that, Prime cuts the connection.

Blue stares at the blank screen for a moment. "Okay, I don't know about you guys, but that actually has me nervous."

Prowl nods. "You're not the only one."

“And that makes me *even more nervous*. Thanks, Prowl.”

“No problem!”

Jazz just leans back and lets the group play. Primus knows, once they find Megatron, they won’t have the chance for this again anytime soon.

help from above

Chapter Notes

> So I don't know how many people from here read any of my fics from ff.net, but if you do, you might recognize the human OCs that show up in this chapter. Recycling is good for the environment.

The small town is little more than a burned-out husk. A group of five soldiers patrol the area – Will Lennox, Robert Epps, "Fig" Figueroa, Kim Sing, and Ashley Stringer. At the moment, all five are silent, hiding behind the crumbling walls of what was once a school building. Admittedly, Jonesville is a ghost town, long ago abandoned, and thus the perfect place to hold war games that involve testing live ammo.

Or at least, that's the cover story.

Lennox knows – this is no damned war game. The robot that used to be an effing jet stands on the other side of the wall, cannon in hand, scanning the area for threats. Lennox thinks the heat of the fires is masking their own thermal signature. Thank God for small mercies.

On the other side of the wall, Starscream scowls.

"This can't possibly be the place."

Beside him, Barricade shrugs. "It's where Megatron said it should be." He looks out at the city on the horizon. Dusk has fallen, and the creatures that live here should be completely ignorant to their presence. Right now, darkness is their friend. "What about the locals?"

Starscream motions dismissively. "Down there. I'll kill them before we leave."

"You don't sound concerned."

"Should I be? They won't even be a *challenge* for Blackout's new pet."

Barricade makes a face. "I can't believe we're relying on *drones* now. I mean, they serve their uses, but as actual soldiers?"

Starscream shrugs. "You tell Megatron he's wrong. I dare you."

"No thanks. I like life."

“Either way, this isn’t the place. Still, it’s far enough away from the other settlements to not draw attention while we search. We should report back.”

“The locals?”

“Scorponok can have his fun with them.”

The humans don’t understand any of this. The robots speak in a series of beeps, clicks, and whistles that are definitely a language, but not one they can translate. Epps leans forward to whisper in Lennox’s ear. “The hell are we gonna do?”

“Not a clue.” he whispers back. “Let’s just hope – “

The ground beneath them rumbles. On the other side of the wall, Starscream and Barricade transform and take off. Fig says something in Spanish under his breath. Lennox figures he’s either swearing or praying. With him it’s hard to tell.

Then the ground *explodes* around them, and Lennox stops caring.

Before he even has the chance to contemplate just how screwed they are, something loud hits the scorpion-like robot square in the side. The scorpion rolls a couple dozen times before finding its bearing and disappearing back into the ground. The team waits, but it never reappears. Slowly, everyone looks up at the giant robot standing above them.

The visored robot grins. “Good bug.”

Epps blinks. “The hell – you speak English!”

“We heard ya talkin’.” the mech says. “Figured it wouldn’ hurt ta try it.”

Slowly, Sing stands up. “We?”

The other mechs come forward. Every last one of them is armed, but only the visored mech has his weapon pointed at anything. The visored mech offers a wry grin and lowers his weapon. “Sorry ta drop in on yer plant. Designation Jazz. This here’s mah team.”

Lennox glances at the group before slowly taking a step forward. “I’m Lennox. This is my team – Epps, Fig, Sing, and Stringer.” He points to each of them in turn. “We’re special ops soldiers. What are you?”

Jazz laughs. “Ops. Awesome. We’re ops, too. This here’s Prowl, Bluestreak, Bumblebee, Mirage, and Hound.”

The one called Prowl looks back towards the city. “We drew attention. We need to get the hell away from here.”

Mirage nods. “Yeah, pretty sure gunfire is not the best way to introduce ourselves to the locals.” he says dryly. He turns his attention to the humans. “I don’t suppose you have an idea of what’s going on, do you?”

Sing just shrugs. “Dude, until about twenty minutes ago, we didn’t even know there was other life out there besides us.”

“Oh. Surprise?”

Fig laughs helplessly. “I think we should get to ground, *amigos*. Save the introductions for when we’re safe.”

“You’re right.” Lennox looks up at the robots. “I don’t suppose you have some way to hide? Our nearest base is in the city.”

“How about until we have a better idea of what’s going on, we go back to the transport?” Prowl suggests. “It has the room for all of us.”

“True enough.” The group transforms back into their alt forms. Jazz opens his door. “Come on, get in. It’ll go faster if ya jus’ come wit us.”

“Yeah, because alien cars aren’t obvious at all.” Epps mutters. The group joins the team. Prowl can’t help but notice how tense Lennox is.

“We won’t hurt you. Not without damn good reason to.” he says quietly. Lennox just shrugs.

“Give me about three hours to wrap my mind around everything, and I’ll relax. It’s not personal.”

“Shell shock. Got it.”

With that, the odd group speeds off away from the town.

/---------/

Scorponok reports back faster than Starscream expected. He gives Blackout a look. “Guess the locals were even less of a challenge than I thought.”

Blackout frowns. “No. They’re still alive.” He turns his gaze to Megatron. “Autobots. He was attacked by a group of Autobots.”

Starscream groans. “Only one tracker could have pulled that off.”

Megatron scowls. “Grow a spinal strut. One group of Autobots cannot defeat us – even if they are ops. Not once we have the AllSpark.”

“But we *don’t have it*.” Starscream points out dryly. He doesn’t bother trying to point out that the stupid thing isn’t supposed to actually *exist*. He lost that argument before it even began. “And they can defeat us. They’ve done it before.”

“We will have it. And then, we will kill them all, starting with that damned ops team.”

Deadshot just looks up with a sigh.

“This is why we’re going to die.”

sitrep

Lennox has to admit – out of all the things he's seen as special ops, this takes the cake. It's extremely unnerving to be standing in an alien spaceship (albeit a very small one) and be surrounded by alien robots that are much, much taller than he is.

This is the weirdest debriefing he's ever been part of.

Stringer's the one to start the conversation. "Okay, mind letting us know just what the hell dropped in on our planet?" she asks.

"Long story short, there's a war goin' on on our planet." Jazz says. "We kicked ass an' took names, an' then good ol' Megs took off an' came here. Got no clue why."

Stringer frowns. "Megs?"

"Megatron." Prowl continues. "He's the leader of the opposite side."

"I'm guessing not the good guys." Epps comments.

Bluestreak flicks his wings in what Lennox assumes is a shrug. "Well, not as far as you're concerned." the young mech says. "The Decepticons aren't what we call *fond* of beings that aren't them."

Sing frowns. "And what – you are?"

"We just don't give a shit." Prowl says bluntly. Jazz promptly smacks him on the back of the helm. Prowl yelps. "What?! It's the truth!"

"You know that program that tells you 'hey, that's offensive – don't say that'?" Mirage asks dryly. "Yeah, go reinstall that."

"Fooled you – I never had that program to begin with." Prowl retorts.

Sing can't help it – he starts laughing. "Hey, you'd get along with Lennox here pretty well. For a leader, he never did have much of a filter." He grins. "Besides, I for one appreciate the honesty. I want to know where we stand when it comes to both groups."

"Well, now you know." Bee says dryly. "But it is true. We're here for a mission – and aside from that mission, we really don't have an opinion on anything else."

Lennox nods. “So you’re here to kick Decepticon ass, and once that’s done, you’ll leave?”

“Pretty much.” Hound says. “There might be some political crap to take care of, but hopefully, it can wait until Optimus gets here.”

“That’s assuming we need him.” Prowl says. “Which I for one am hoping we can raid Megatron’s supplies and not have to call home for a lift.” There’s a general murmur of consensus from the rest of the mechs that has Stringer and Sing cracking up. Epps speaks up.

“Wait – you guys are stranded here?”

“Well, tha’ depends on a fair number of things.” Jazz says easily. “Le’s just say we hopin’ not.”

“Our turn for a few questions.” Prowl says. “What can you tell us about the ‘Cons? Clearly, you knew something was up if you were out there when they were.”

Lennox nods. “They showed up on our radar when they entered our airspace.” he says. “So our military sent us out here to scout it out. Since we’re ops, we’re usually pretty good at handling anything unusual. But I gotta say – aliens is out of our league.”

Prowl and Jazz exchange looks. Jazz tilts his helm in question. Prowl nods. Jazz grins. “Awesome.”

Fig raises his hand. “I think we missed something here.”

“Don’t worry, so did we.” Bluestreak says cheerfully.

“Shaddup.” Jazz laughs. “Well, mah human ops friends – how would ya like ta have our help? We could use the assist with dealin’ wit’ local customs.”

“And we could use the assist with taking down big scary robots.” Epps says.

Lennox nods. “True enough. Okay – let’s do it.”

“Holy shit.” Lennox breathes. “That’s – how many Decepticons came here again?”

“Not this many.” Prowl says dryly.

It didn’t take them long to find Megatron’s transport. He landed not too far away from where they found the human ops team, the transport mostly hidden in a small ravine. (Well, small by Cybertronian standards, at any rate.) Prowl himself lies prone on the ground a good distance away, with the human perched on his shoulder. Both have a scope.

The trees obscuring Prowl from view are not ideal – absolutely nothing on this planet was designed with something his height in mind – but at least the darkness provides him with some cover.

It helps that the Decepticons are completely unconcerned with keeping a low profile. They’re just standing there, out in the open, discussing whatever it is that’s brought them to Earth. From his position, Prowl can see Starscream and Barricade talking in front of the transport. Mirage has a lock on Deadshot and Blackout. Scans indicate three more mechs inside the transport, probably the newly promoted after what the teams did to Megatron’s army. None of this bothers Prowl.

It’s the five drones, including the bug they attacked earlier, that concerns him.

::You know, from this angle, I could probably take out Starscream and Barricade with one bullet.::

Prowl chuckles at that. “I wouldn’t recommend that just yet, Blue.” He glances at Lennox. “Our sniper has a clear shot and a twitchy finger.”

“Are we sure we should be letting him hang out with Fig?” the human says dryly. “So why not take the shot?”

“They came to this planet for a reason. I want to know what.”

“People could die. Civilians.”

“People will die anyway. Megatron isn’t down there, and I don’t know where he is.” Prowl vents in frustration. “Trust me on this. If this were

Cybertron, I'd have Blue take the damn shot. But it's not, and everything I have seen so far tells me we want to keep this from escalating for as long as we possibly can." He grimaces. "Besides, those drones concern me."

"How so?"

"He shouldn't have them. We know he left with certain supplies, but we never learned what they were for. And with no spark signature and barely any thermal or scent, there isn't a good way to track them."

"Well, damn it."

"Definitely." Prowl reaches out to Jazz. ::Is there a safe way into the transport?::

::If Ah had a distraction.::

::Of course.:: For a long moment, Prowl falls silent. The others hold their positions and let him think. The best distraction would be taking down Starscream and Barricade, or possibly one of the drones. Use Blue to the fullest of his ability. That's the immediately obvious solution.

::Prowler. Whatcha thinkin'?::

Prowl grimaces. "Remember our first mission under Optimus?"

Hound curses rather colorfully. ::Jazz, give me five minutes. Blue, watch my back.::

::Affirmative!::

Lennox taps Prowl on the helm. "I'm only catching half the conversation. Fill me in, please."

"Long story short, we walked right into a trap." Prowl says quietly. "Like I said, drones aren't easy to track, and Megatron likes to take advantage of that. Hound has some programs he shouldn't to make it easier, but there are ways around that. So, he's doing a quick patrol."

His comm crackles to life. ::Prowl, we need to take you to the gambling tables. There are at least ten other drones out here. Very, very basic ones. I think they're programmed to react to sound – specifically, a gunshot.:: He can practically hear Hound's grin. ::Don't ask me how I figured that out. More importantly, Megatron is not in

the area. I caught his scent heading away towards the base we noted earlier.::

“Swell.” Prowl mutters. “So any gunfire is going to attract the attention of absolutely everyone, which we don’t want.” Slowly, he smiles. “Mirage, Bee – you guys up for having some fun?”

::Mech, I like where your processor is heading.:: Mirage replies gleefully.

::If Bee don’ mind takin’ care of our friends out here, Ah’ll go ahead an’ raid th’ transport.:: Jazz says. ::Got a feelin’ Deadshot ain’ gonna be a problem.::

::Hell yeah, mech – I got this.:: Bee responds.

“Blue, go with Hound. Your job is going to be tracking down Megatron. Do not engage – just figure out where he’s heading and get back to our transport.” Prowl helps Lennox off his shoulder and sets the human on the ground.

Lennox looks up expectantly. “How can we help?”

“For now, hang back and watch. I want you to see how we fight so you can figure out how best we can help each other. After all, you know this planet and your people better than I ever will.” He flashes Lennox a vicious smile. “Let us show you why the Decepticons *really* don’t like us.”

Lennox looks like he might protest, but even he sees the value in observation. He nods. “You got it.”

Prowl pushes himself into a crouch and vanishes into the woods. From behind Lennox, Epps steps out of the trees, followed by the rest of the team. “Something that big should not be able to move that quietly.” Sing says, keeping his voice low. Lennox nods. “It definitely didn’t take them long to adapt to this planet.”

“They’re ops, adapting is what they do.” Stringer says pointedly. “I seem to remember you can fake a pretty good Russian accent when your life was on the line.”

“That’s a culture, not a planet.”

“You’re afraid of them.” Lennox says.

“Yes, I am.” Sing says dryly. “Anyone with brain cells would be.”

“Dude, if they were gonna hurt us, I think they would have done it by now.” Epps points out.

“And that’s why I haven’t said anything.” Sing retorts.

Before the argument can get going good, the mechs in the ravine explode into action.

Mirage and Prowl strike in near-tandem, Mirage after Starscream and Prowl after Barricade. Starscream shrieks and transforms, taking off almost instantaneously, but not before Mirage scored a solid hit on his side. The spray of energon is obvious even in the dim light.

Barricade hits the ground, Prowl perched on top of his back. Before the Decepticon can get his bearings, Prowl has already stabbed him twice – one sword through the doorwing, the other through his chassis. The mech falls completely still, even as Prowl jerks out both weapons. Prowl rolls off the mech and stands to his feet in one movement, both swords at the ready.

“Help out Bee.” he orders Mirage. “I can handle these guys.” Mirage shakes his head.

“You think I’m gonna let you have all the fun?” He falls in beside Prowl, facing off against the drones, sword and dagger at the ready.

Lennox doesn’t miss the fond smile that crosses Prowl’s face.

Behind the transport but still visible to the humans, Jazz vanishes inside while Bee faces off against Blackout. For a moment, it looks like Deadshot isn’t going to be of any help at all. Then again, it doesn’t look like Bee really needs the help. Lennox can immediately tell that Bee isn’t completely comfortable with his sword, but he’s adept enough to take on Blackout and hold his own. It takes about three minutes of fighting, but then Blackout also transforms and takes off.

With Prowl and Mirage, Scorponok immediately burrows into the ground and vanishes from sight. The other drones are dealt with quickly and viciously. Shed energon drips from their swords. Mirage grins at Prowl.

“Nothing to it.”

Prowl laughs outright at that.

Jazz, Bee, and Deadshot join them. Jazz grins and leans against Prowl's side. "Ya enjoy yerself?"

"Immensely." Prowl turns his attention to Deadshot. "Are you coming back with us, or staying here?"

Deadshot shrugs. "I'll stay here for as long as I can." he says. "You'll still need a man on the inside." Prowl nods.

"We need to clear out. I'm sure Starscream and Blackout went to report to Megatron." Bee says. He grins at Deadshot. "Thanks for staying out of my way." Deadshot just takes a mocking bow, making Bee laugh again.

Lennox watches as the group splits up, the Autobots heading back their way while Deadshot just stays in the clearing and observes the carnage. He glances at Sing.

"I think you may have a point."

reporting in

Optimus has to say, he's rather grateful to hear from the team so soon.

The vid screen is a little low-resolution, but that's to be expected with the distance. He can still hear and see the team – and the small organics that are hanging out with his mechs. Hell, there's even one perched on Prowl's shoulder. The entire group appears to be in good health. Prime arches an optic ridge. "Making friends with the locals already?"

Jazz shrugs. "We were their introduction ta alien life."

"Primus. I would like to apologize on the behalf of our planet." There's a moment while Bluestreak translates for the humans, and laughter ripples through the group. "What language are they speaking?"

"English." Prowl supplies. "It's something of the trade language here. We'll send you the data file."

Optimus nods. "I'll make sure Blaster secures a proper channel for the transfer. You have something to report?"

"Lots." Jazz says dryly. "Apparently good ol' Megs is lookin' fer a way ta mass-produce drones."

Optimus considers that for a moment. "Well, shit. Has he found a way yet?"

"Not ta our knowledge. We know he thinks th' humans might be able ta help."

"A group of humans." one of the group – the one on Prowl's shoulder – is quick to point out. Blue translates, as well as provides quick introductions. The one called Lennox continues to speak. "I'd like it on record that most of us don't want an alien war on our planet."

"Yeah, we gotta couple franchises about why that's a bad idea." Epps comments dryly. Lennox promptly punches him in the arm, making the other humans laugh.

Optimus pinches the bridge of his nose, which makes Prowl laugh. "Hey, ops are ops."

“Primus help their planet.”

“Oh, shut up. You love us.”

“Is there a reason you believe Megatron to be enlisting the aid of the locals?” Optimus says, effectively cutting across any more banter.

Hound takes over the explanation. “Blue and I followed him the other day. Tracked him all the way to a human base of operations. Something called Sector Seven – our new allies haven’t heard of it, so we’re guessing they’re operating off the grid. Which isn’t to say that we can’t get information on it.”

Optimus nods. “How do you plan on doing that?”

“By getting me close to it.” Bee says bluntly. “Aside from Jazz, I’m the best hacker we have. And I’m a bit smaller than he is. Most of the stuff around here isn’t designed with anything as big as us in mind.”

“Most organic species don’t evolve like that.” Optimus turns his attention to Prowl. “I’m guessing you’re working on a plan for that?”

“I am. With Lennox’s help. Now that they’ve seen us fight, they can help us navigate the terrain.”

Lennox says something that Blue doesn’t bother to translate. Optimus doesn’t need him to. He’s well aware of what effect the team has on mechs who are used to the brutality of their war. He wonders how the team effected this team, wonders briefly if ops on this organic planet work the same way as ops on his own, and decides those are questions best left to later. Instead he keeps his focus on Prowl. “They’ve seen you fight?”

Prowl flicks his wings in a shrug. “Well, they already had quite a few drones. And we needed the supplies.”

“Speaking of, did you get what you needed?”

“Enough that we won’t starve. Probably not enough to get us back home. Depends on how long this takes.”

Optimus shakes his helm. “Primus. I’m gonna have to come get you anyway, aren’t I?” Prowl merely smiles. Optimus can’t help but chuckle. “Fine, whatever. Go kick their ass, keep in touch. And get me that file – I don’t think Bluestreak wants to spend his entire time here translating for me.”

“I like translating!” Blue protests, making the human Sing laugh.

“Yeah, he’s been translating for Fig this entire time.” he teases. Fig rattles off a long string of what Prowl calls Spanish, earning him a punch in the shoulder from Sing. Bluestreak replies in kind, making the other humans groan and protest good-naturedly.

It really is like looking at smaller versions of his team.

His gaze slides over to Prowl and Jazz. Even knowing they’re bonded, he still has a hard time seeing it, which is telling. Despite the security of their transport, they do not feel safe enough to reveal a potential weakness between them.

Then again, Optimus pities the mech or organic who thinks he can use those two against each other.

“Stay safe.” he says and signs off the connection.

Prowl watches as the screen goes black, Lennox still perched on his shoulder. The human taps his arm. “You’re awfully familiar with your CO.” he says, sounding a little confused. “But he was pretty familiar with you.”

Jazz grins. “Helps tha’ they’re related.” he teases.

“Really?”

“Yeah. Optimus is my – I think the human phrase would be ‘adopted dad’. He didn’t create me, but he did raise me like his own.” Prowl says mildly.

“Wow. Impressive.”

“Not really. Optimus is impressive without me – and I’m impressive without him.” His gaze cuts to Jazz for just a second before returning to Lennox. “Now, we need to find a way to get Bee into that facility.”

Lennox accepts the change in subject, but he doesn’t forget it, or the look that crossed Jazz’s face at Prowl’s words. Looks like there’s more to this ops team than he originally thought.

Interesting.

double agents

It's not the first time Jazz has had this thought, but he finds himself having the thought yet again while watching Prowl and Lennox plot with a human map – Prowl is terrifying, and he is damned glad the mech is on his side.

Mirage stands next to him, watching the entire plotting session passively. He glances at Jazz. "I think Lennox is a human version of Prowl." he says dryly, switching back to Cybertronian. "Should we be concerned?"

Jazz actually laughs at that. "Ya think a human c'n take mah place? Ah'm too awesome fer that." he teases.

Mirage grins. "And ever so humble." he shoots right back. "You think Bee can get in and out unseen? We don't know a thing about human structures or anything else on this planet."

"Oh, Ah'm sure Bee knows a hell of a lot more th'n we do already. Ah jus' don' know how Prowler's handlin' it."

Mirage snorts at that. "You think he's having trouble with this?"

Jazz motions towards the mech in question. "Watch. Lookit his doorwings. See how he ain' movin' them at all?" Mirage nods. "He's stressed. This ain' Cybertron, like ya said. We don' know this place, so we're relyin' on Lennox an' his team ta help us. But we don' know if we can trust him. Prowler's workin' overtime." Mirage nods understanding.

Inside his spark, Jazz feels Prowl nudge him gently. /You know, I can hear both of you./ he teases lightly. /It's rather distracting./

Jazz's laughter resonates through their bond. /Ah know ya c'n handle it./ he teases back. /How ya holdin' up?/

/Well, your assessment isn't wrong./ comes the rather sour reply. /But we need that intel./

/Ah know, Prowler. Ya know we trust ya./

/Yeah, sometimes that's not a help./

Jazz knows exactly what he means by that. Before he can say

anything, Blue returns from patrol. “Look who I drug in!” he says cheerfully, keeping to the human language. “Deadshot decided to drop by.”

Everyone instantly looks up as Blue, Deadshot, and a *human* of all things walks into the transport. The human male doesn’t seem too bothered by being surrounded by a bunch of aliens, Jazz thinks. Not like Lennox and the team. He’s wearing a suit and tie, and he seems way too comfortable with Deadshot. He glances at Prowl.

Prowl merely arches an optic ridge. “I see you have a shadow.” he says, following Blue’s lead.

Deadshot laughs. “This is Agent Seymour Simmons. He’s part of the humans that are working with Megatron, but he doesn’t like those arrangements. So we decided to defect.”

“We?” Epps demands. “You mean you defecting too?”

“Yep. I’ll do more good on your side with what’s coming next.” Deadshot motions to the human at his feet. “Go on, Simmons. Tell them what you know.”

Simmons makes a face but speaks. “Just to clarify, I’m not a double agent, and I’m not defecting. I’m just not stupid enough to think Megatron is going to hold up his promises, and I don’t want to die. I’m looking out for myself and my species. Nothing more.”

Lennox rolls his eyes. “Look, we don’t care. What the hell do you think we’re doing over here? Just tell us what you know.”

“Fine then. A very long time ago, a few government agents made a discovery not too far from the ravine where the Decepticons put up camp. We put a building around it and hid it as well as we could. Sector Seven grew up around protecting and studying the discovery so we could learn from it. Then Megatron shows up telling us he can teach us how to harness its energy.”

“He’s been using it to try to mass-produce drones.” Deadshot adds. “Problem is, the drones that are sparked with this energy usually aren’t sane. They attack whoever is nearby.”

“Sparked?” Bee says. “Drones don’t have sparks. They’re programmed and energized, nothing more.”

Stringer holds up her hand. “What do you mean by sparked?”

Hound takes over. “Sparks are our souls. They’re what give us our personalities and keep us from being just advanced robots. They’re the reason we can feel. Drones don’t have those, which is also why drones tend to be rare. They give the rest of us the creeps.”

“But these drones have sparks?” Prowl demands. “How?”

“What energy are we talkin’ ‘bout?” Jazz asks.

Simmons merely shrugs. “We always referred to it as the Artifact. But Megatron called it the AllSpark.”

Prowl snorts. “The AllSpark is a myth.”

“Kinda makes sense, though.” Blue says slowly. “I mean, there’s a lot of prep that goes into a sparkling. Imagine being sparked into a fully programmed frame, with no steps. That’s a lot to ask of a newspark.”

“Imagine takin’ a newborn awareness and puttin’ it inside an adult body.” Jazz tells the other humans. “Ah don’ think it would go well.”

“You guys are forgetting something.” Prowl says dryly. “The AllSpark doesn’t actually exist.”

“What is the AllSpark?” Sing asks.

“It’s what Primus used to create our people.” Mirage says. “According to the story, Primus used to AllSpark to create the first Cybertronians. Unicron wanted it to make his own twisted creations, so to keep it out of his hands, Primus hid it somewhere it couldn’t be found.” He shrugs. “Since we can create sparks and frames, no one really felt the need to go looking for it.”

“Shockwave did.” Deadshot says. “That’s how Megatron got wind it was here.”

“Lovely.” Prowl gives Deadshot a look. “Why exactly was Shockwave after the quasi-mythical AllSpark?”

“I thought it was safer not to ask.”

Sing looks up at Mirage. “Who is Shockwave?”

“Very, very dead. And we all sleep better because of it.” Mirage says dryly. “So, for the sake of Prowl’s sanity, let’s just pretend Megatron found *something* that behaves like the AllSpark does –“ Prowl throws an energon ration at him, which Mirage simply catches and throws

back at him – “so let’s go do something about it so we can go home.”

“Hear, hear.” Hound says.

Simmons speaks up. “If you’re going to do that, then you’ll want move quickly. Megatron is planning to take the AllSpark into the city tomorrow. If I understood his intentions, the entire planet will find out about your species in the most explosive way possible.”

Prowl and Jazz exchange looks. “Yeah, that’s probably unavoidable.” Prowl admits. He turns his complete attention to Simmons. “I need to know everything you know about Megatron’s plan – and everything you know about the city.”

Lennox steps forward. “We can help with the city part. Give us the name, and we’ll dig out some maps and show you the layout.”

Jazz just grins as he watches Prowl, Lennox, and now Simmons go to work.

Yeah, he’s *really glad* Prowl is on his side.

countdown pt 2

Chapter Notes

> Since we're so close to the end of this story and I keep forgetting about it, have a quarantine gift of the last five chapters all at once!

Prowl watches as everything starts to fall into place.

Lennox and Epps are in contact with their commander, initializing plans to evacuate Mission City. The city is home to hundreds of thousands of people, roughly the same size as Iacon, so it's going to take some time. They're starting immediately. The evacuation will alert Megatron that something is up. Coupled with the disappearance of Deadshot, it might even tip him off that the team knows about his plan.

It's a risk they have to run. As hard as it was evacuating Iacon quietly, it's going to be even worse with a human city. At least the civilians there knew what was coming.

Jazz nudges his shoulder. "Ah'm havin' flashbacks ta Shockwave." he says, his voice unusually serious for a change. Prowl nods. Jazz continues. "Ya know, Ah c'n never get a read on ya."

"How so?"

"Ya never seem afraid. Ah mean, Ah c'n count on one hand th' number of times Ah've seen ya actually afraid, an' tha' was right after Shockwave in th' med bay."

Prowl chuckles at that. "I've been afraid so many more times than that, Jazzy." he replies quietly. "I just learned pretty early on how to work with it."

Jazz nods. "Ya afraid now?"

"Yes. Too many variables that I can't control." He reaches out and takes Jazz's hand, watching as the rest of his team prepares. No one seems unduly concerned by the coming fight, and Prowl would prefer to keep it that way. Still. "Sometimes I think you trust me way too much."

That earns him a small chuckle. "Nah, mech. Ah trust ya just enough.

Ya've earned it."

Prowl smiles. "You're biased."

"Duh. Yah saved mah life."

Prowl's grip on his hand tightens. "You gave me a purpose. I think we're even."

Before Jazz can say anything, Mirage walks over. "You guys need your weapons serviced? I'm done with mine, but I can't do shit with Bee and Blue's stuff."

Jazz laughs. "We're good. Ah wanna watch ya try ta clean Blue's rifle."

"I told him if he touched my gun, I would have to take his hand off and make a wall sculpture out of it." Blue says cheerfully.

"And I said that was oddly specific." Mirage says dryly. "I think he's spent way too much time with us."

Sing pipes up from where he's cleaning his own gun. "Actually, I was wondering about that. Bluestreak seems a lot younger than the rest of you. So, how old are you guys?"

There's a brief moment while Jazz does the calculations. "Well, th' numbers don' exactly add up, but me an' Prowl an' Raj would be in our 30s, Bee would be in his 20s, an' Blue would be, like – " He glances at Prowl helplessly. "Ah don' know."

"What's the human age for legally allowed to be on their own, but probably not actually old enough to take care of themselves?" Bee asks suddenly, earning himself a punch in the arm from Bluestreak and laughter from the rest of the group. Bee grins and shoves him back. "What? It's true!"

"Never start a fight with someone who can end you from a separate city." Blue says sagely. Fig snorts and replies with a string of Spanish that has Blue laughing and Sing throwing a pencil at him.

"Look, I don't even speak Spanish, and I know that was unnecessary."

Lennox and Epps join the group. "Okay, so the evacuation is underway, but we're gonna draw a hell of a lot of attention while it's happening." Lennox says. "I'm hoping that's part of the plan."

“It can be.” Prowl says easily. “Knowing Megatron, he’ll either completely ignore it, because it’s not part of his plan, or he’ll realize it means we’re coming after him.”

“Either way, it’s not like he’s going to change his plans.” Deadshot says dryly. “Despite everything, Megatron doesn’t seem to care too much that the deadliest mechs on Cybertron have decided that he needs to die.”

“His loss.” Mirage muses.

“Our gain.” Hound laughs.

“Deadliest, huh?” Lennox asks. “So, what, Megatron doesn’t have his own ops teams?”

“He does. Sort of.” Bee says easily. He subspaces his gun and turns his attention to the conversation. “Megatron is good, don’t get me wrong. We talk about him like he’s a dumbass, but there’s a reason this war has dragged on as long as it has. The Autobots have always been better, but not enough so to just end the damn thing.”

“Basically, Prime kept walking into traps early on.” Prowl says. “He’s one of those mechs who believes in an honest fight, and Megatron believes in winning.” He shrugs. “You can imagine how well that worked out. That’s when he got Gunner on board – our head of ops. Also third in command.”

“Gunner believes if you find yourself in a fair fight, your tactics suck.” Mirage adds on. “And so the ops teams were born. Optimus didn’t like using us at first – too dishonest for his taste – but I like to think we’ve proven our usefulness.”

Blue laughs at that. “If decimating over half of Megatron’s force doesn’t do the trick, I don’t wanna know what will.”

“You seem awfully okay with everything.” Fig says, for once speaking English. “I mean, you a kid, right? Kids don’t belong in war.”

“Megatron destroyed my city.” Blue says simply. “This team is the only reason I’m still alive.” He flicks his wings in a dismissive gesture. “I think I’m right where I belong.”

“Saved my ass once or twice.” Prowl says with a grin. “I’m okay with it.”

“Still really glad he wasn’t there for the minefield incident.” Bee says thoughtfully. Prowl protests while the rest of the group laughs. Lennox can’t help but laugh along with them.

Ops are ops, no matter the species.

The computer beeps, and Morshower’s voice comes over the speakers. *“The city is as evacuated as it’s gonna get, and we’ve got reports of bogeys on the way.”*

“And that’s our cue to head out.” Prowl says. “Let’s go.”

when ashes fall

The city is quiet.

That makes Starscream very nervous.

Blackout has the same misgivings. “Seriously, I think Iacon was more crowded than this place. Are the humans just that quiet?”

Starscream shakes his helm. “Thermal scans show nothing. Just a few stragglers that are keeping indoors.” Which is probably for the best, considering what he suspects is about to happen. “I told Megatron this is a trap.”

“Yeah, well, he still thinks he’s going to win this war.” Blackout says darkly. “Which, yeah, maybe – if the damn team hadn’t followed us here.” Starscream nods in assent but doesn’t say anything.

Megatron walks up behind them, a small (to them) cube held in his hand. “You underestimate the AllSpark, Starscream. Even that team can’t stand against us now.”

Yes, because drones stand against them so well, Starscream thinks sourly, but has the sense not to say. Megatron walks past them into the city. Everything about his posture and stride screams confidence, and Starscream almost finds himself encouraged by it.

That lasts about five seconds.

Whatever Megatron was planning to do with the AllSpark, he doesn’t get the chance. He holds it up in the air, and the cube begins to *glow* –

And that’s when someone decides to throw a sonic grenade at them.

The high-pitched shrieking that completely deafens the group of Decepticons actually has no effect on the humans who have allied with the team. Lennox leads them in, shouting orders while his ops team fan out around the group. Megatron screams in agony –

And drops the damned cube.

Before any of the Decepticons can react, a human races forward, grabs the cube, and is gone again in the maze of buildings. Megatron growls. ::Get it back!:: Blackout transforms and takes off into the air.

::Look alive, he probably still has the bug on the ground!:: Mirage calls out over their comms. It comes over the humans' radios as well. ::Sing, watch your six.::

::I've got him!:: Bee says cheerfully.

::I've got my perch.:: Blue announces. ::I'll make sure you get there.::

Lennox nods. "Come on – let's keep these assholes busy so our boys can get out!" he shouts. "Stringer, you got your perch?"

"Locked and loaded." comes over the comms. "Just waiting for the order."

::Do it.:: Prowl says. ::We need to keep them as far out of the city as we can.::

Right as the Decepticons start to recover from the grenade, Lennox and the team open fire. Hot lead pings off of ankles and shins, occasionally hitting sensitive wiring, while Stringer uses her own sniper perch to aim for the optics.

Prowl and Jazz watch, hidden in the alleys between the tallest buildings they could find, and Prowl smiles. "This appears to be working." he says quietly. Jazz snorts.

"Here's ta hopin' we don' have ta implement phase two." he mutters. Prowl inclines his helm in agreement. ::Raj, ya an' Hound in position?::

::Almost, boss.::

::Good. Let meh know - ::

"Grenade!"

Lennox's desperate scream has Prowl and Jazz moving. They race into the street just as a very human grenade lands in the group, exploding a bare second later even as the human team scatters. Prowl scans the other side of the street, back inside the city, and scowls.

"Mercenaries. Great."

"Ah think Ah spoke too soon about phase two." Jazz snarls. ::Change o' plans, boys an' girls – we'll take care of th' Decepticons. Bee, there's gonna be humans on yer ass too.::

::Great.:: Bee mutters darkly. ::So what do I do?::

::Get rid of them.:: Jazz says bluntly. ::If ya gotta, it's yer life first. Yers and Sing's.::

::Roger that.::

With that, Prowl and Jazz explode from their hiding places, blades flashing in the early dawn light. They place themselves between the Decepticons and the human team, giving them the chance to disappear into the alleys. No one seems to be seriously hurt. Prowl grins.

"Only three of you and some humans?" he taunts. "Weak, Megs."

Megatron snarls and barks a command. Ten more drones appear behind him. They look half-assed, barely holding together. Jazz scowls. ::Looks like he's hopin' ta outnumber us.::

::Too bad we don't care about the odds.:: Prowl says dryly. His smile never fades, though, and that makes Starscream take a half-step back. From behind him, he can hear other humans vanishing into the alleys and side streets. Some of them seem to be gathering behind them. He's guessing whoever threw the grenade, probably the mercenaries. "Well, at least the odds are a little more in your favor."

Megatron snarls.

"Destroy them!"

Sing has to say – this is not how he wanted to spend his Saturday.

Bee catches up with him, and he jumps into the passenger's seat, the cube held securely in his arms. Bee slams the door shut and burns rubber down the road. Thankfully, there are no other humans out besides the mercenaries and the team. The last thing they need is collateral damage.

Someone opens fire on them from above.

Sing curses. "Who the hell is that?!"

"Blackout." Bee says tersely. ::Where the hell is the bug?::

::Back with Megatron.:: Bluestreak says. ::Looks like he's helping to keep the team busy. Mirage is heading your way to deal with Blackout. All you'll have to worry about is the humans. Looks like they're trying to blockade the street about six blocks down.::

::Screw them, then.:: "Hold on, Sing – this is gonna be a bumpy ride."

/----------/

Back at the edge of the city, the fight begins in earnest.

The drones surge forward, weapons at the ready. Prowl, Jazz, and Hound meet them head-on. Starscream stands just behind Megatron, watching and assessing.

One might think that, being down three members, that the ops team would be at a bit of a disadvantage, especially once the human mercenaries from Sector Seven come into play. As Autobots, they should be cautious of hurting humans, a primitive race that should be deserving of protection. That *should*, at the very least, slow them down and make them easier for the drones to corner.

Yeah. Right.

One of the mercenaries manages to aim an RPG at the team, only to have the weapon shot out of his hands by the sniper. As the weapon skitters across the ground, Hound turns around, grabs the mercenary, and tosses him into his companions hard enough to send three of them skidding two blocks down the road. In the same motion, he grabs the

jeep and throws it at the nearest drone.

With a battle cry, the human ops team charges the mercenaries, effectively distracting them from the mechs. The human team pushes the mercenaries further back into the city, away from the mechs and their battle.

Prowl and Jazz seem to come to the unanimous decision to leave the drones to Hound (not that he needs the help) and charge straight at Megatron and Starscream. Starscream immediately tries to take to the air, only to have Prowl grab his ankle and throw him into the nearest drone, neatly shattering it.

Megatron steps to the side, laughing. “These are just phase one! The true beauty of the AllSpark is in phase two! Barricade!”

Prowl and Jazz exchange looks, weapons at the ready. ::Ya killed ‘Cade, right?:: Jazz asks.

::Shattered his spark chamber.:: Prowl confirms dryly. ::So I have no idea - ::

Barricade steps out of the nearest alley. Jazz goes completely still. “Th’ hell?”

::Um, Prowl? Should I shoot it?::

::No, Blue. I have this.:: Prowl takes a step forward. Barricade still looks like himself – somewhat. His frame has been given the most basic of repairs, just enough to keep his energon from completely draining out. His spark chamber has been repaired, but barely. Through the cracks, Prowl can see the flickering glow of a newspark.

Okay, he might actually be sold on the whole AllSpark thing now.

Still, those optics are blank. Nothing of the mech Prowl knows is behind them. This is just a drone. A freaky as all hell drone, but still a drone.

Megatron gets tired of waiting. “Barricade – destroy him.”

“Prowl!”

“Help Hound. Barricade is mine.”

/---------/

Despite the best efforts of Mirage, Blackout still manages to get in a few good hits on Bumblebee.

Sing can practically *feel* the mech's fury at that. Over the comms, he can hear his own team shouting words of encouragement and orders at each other, and his grip on the Cube tightens.

"We need to ditch this thing fast." he says quietly. "I need to help my team."

"You and me both." Bee says darkly. He swerves again, making Blackout's shot go wide. A car behind them explodes, taking out the windows in a nearby office building. It's a miracle the collateral damage isn't any worse than it is. "Still – this thing is just a hair more important." Another shot almost hits him. Bee curses. ::Dammit, Mirage, you're supposed to keep him off my ass!::

::I'm not Blue, and he's needed with the others.:: Mirage says testily. ::Deadshot is set up on the outskirts of the city – if you can get that far, he'll make damn sure Blackout stops where he is.::

::I hope he's ready. I'm coming in hot.::

::I'm ready for you.:: Deadshot says. ::I even have backup.::

Sing frowns. "Backup? What kind of backup?"

"We'll find out soon enough." Bee says. "Hold on tight!"

Sing braces himself as they fly towards the city limits. He has just enough time to see metal legs in front of them as Bee comes to a screeching halt, spinning on his wheels to avoid losing control.

Something *loud* explodes over them. The shot knocks Blackout out of the air, sending him crashing into a nearby building. The resulting explosion is enough to shatter even more windows and set off half the car alarms in the city.

Sing is really, *really glad* they evacuated.

He gets out of Bee as the small mech transforms back into his robot form. Bee grins at the new arrival.

"Hey, Prime – did you miss us that badly?"

Optimus Prime stands there, smoking gun in one hand, another mech to his left and Deadshot to his right. Prime offers the scout a small

smile. “I thought I told you guys *not* to break things.” he says mildly.

“You’re the one who exploded Blackout.” Bee points out. “Hey, would you take this for us? I think the team could use a hand.”

Prime kneels down to Sing’s level, and Sing hands him the Cube. As soon as Prime takes it, it glows for just a minute.

Optimus has to reset his optics. “Do you know what this is, Bumblebee?”

Bee shrugs. “We have an idea – we know what Megatron thinks it is. Doesn’t really matter what it actually is.”

Optimus just nods and tucks the Cube away into a compartment in his arm. “Let’s circle around the city. I don’t want to cause any more damage than we already have.”

legends rise

Jazz has been afraid for Prowl before. Hell, his partner has given him plenty of opportunity for it. Still, not even the fixation Shockwave had on the Praxian caused this level of anxiety in Jazz. At least that was still within the realm of normality.

This?

This isn't.

Bluestreak cuts across their comms. ::Scans show it's running warmer than a normal drone, but that's about it. No nasty surprises, nothing else that I can see.::

Jazz frowns. ::Huh. Ah woulda booby-trapped it.:: And that just ramps his anxiety up all the more.

Prowl flicks his doorwings and adjusts his grip on his swords. Everything about his body language screams nonchalance, but Jazz can read the more subtle signs. More importantly, he can *feel* the confusion rolling through his mate. Still. ::Blue, if Megatron so much as twitches, shoot him. Jazz, help Hound.::

::Don't do anything stupid, Prowl.:: Mirage cuts across their comms.

Prowl smiles at that.

Barricade stumbles forward and throws a punch. Prowl calmly steps out of the way. The thing operates smoother than Prowl would have figured, considering its condition, but still not as fast as Barricade could move. Prowl's gaze flickers over to Megatron, who's watching the entire thing with a smirk on his face.

There probably is some kind of nasty surprise, even if it is something as simple as hoping to drive Prowl close enough to get caught by the Decepticon leader. Until he knows, though, he won't risk having Blue just shoot the idiot. Not yet.

Blue watches the dance as Prowl slowly guides Barricade closer and closer to Megatron himself, dodging punches and kicks while never striking back. Jazz keeps a sharp optic on the fight, but he jumps into the fray with Hound. Any words exchanged between those two are done over private comms. Starscream is nowhere to be found, but he'll

probably show back up later. Coward.

Something shifts. Barricade lunges forward, Prowl steps aside –

And suddenly there's a dagger driven int o the hilt under Prowl's chassis.

Prowl can't completely stop his cry of pain as he staggers back. Barricade tries to press the advantage, another dagger in his hand, but Blue shoots him in the helm.

Nothing happens. Barricade just keeps coming.

Bluestreak gapes. ::What the actual hell!::

Megatron laughs as Prowl continues to back away. "Idiots! This isn't just some clumsy reanimation! Barricade is still in there – if you can reach him. You were friends in the day, weren't you, Prowl? Surely that means something to a noble Autobot."

Prowl's lip curls in a sneer, but he doesn't acknowledge Megatron. Jazz glances at Hound. ::Ya got this?::

::Please. Go.::

In a flash, Jazz is in between Prowl and Barricade, driving off the drone with quick movements of his daggers. Prowl takes the moment to catch his breath. Finally, he straightens and takes a step forward.

Megatron grins. "No words for your old friend?"

"Nothing printable." Prowl quips. His voice *almost* sounds normal. Blue doubts Megatron has noticed, but Jazz certainly has. ::Jazz, we just might have to dismantle the thing. Find whatever the hell is keeping it alive.::

Jazz sends back affirmative. /Ya okay fer this?/

/Yeah. It hurts, but it didn't hit anything vital. Just surprised me./ Still, he's not taking out the dagger. Considering where it's sitting, it's probably keeping him from bleeding too much. They'll just have to end this quickly.

He lunges for Barricade's exposed back at the same time Jazz attacks from the front.

/---------/

Optimus allows Bumblebee to guide himself, Deadshot, and Ratchet to the other side of the city. The human that was with him has gone into the city. Mirage is with him, though – Optimus is not concerned. As they head out, Bumblebee updates them on the situation.

::Blue's been feeding me information.:: he explains. ::Looks like Megatron used the cube-thing to reanimate one of his soldiers – Barricade.::

::Why though?:: Ratchet demands. ::And what the hell is this thing that it can bring back the dead?::

::Reanimate.:: Bee corrects. ::This isn't Barricade. It's a drone, made from Barricade's body. Powered by a newspark. We think.::

::That's more than enough to give me a headache.:: Optimus says dryly. ::We'll figure out what's going on when we get there. Are there any injuries?::

::Prowl. Took a dagger to the chassis. He's playing it off, so there's no telling how much damage was actually done, but he's not bleeding everywhere, so that's a plus.::

Ratchet grunts. ::Good thing I brought my medkit.::

::Which one?::

::The one that'll let me treat anything short of major surgery. At the very least, I'll be able to stabilize any injuries until we get back to Cybertron.::

Mirage cuts into the conversation. ::The last of the human mercenaries have been rounded up and apprehended. Lennox's team is heading back across town to meet up with us. Any idea of the status of that fight?::

::Ongoing.:: Blue reports. ::But I think Jazz and Prowl are having fun.::

::Primus above.:: Mirage mutters, but the fondness is clear.

The group finds the fight easily enough. They arrive just in time to see Jazz and Prowl strike the killing blows, Jazz's daggers shattering what remains of Barricade's spark chamber while Prowl's swords shear the mech's head and shoulders from his body.

The moment Barricade's body falls, Megatron draws his own gun and

aims.

Two shots ring out.

One hits Megatron right between the optics. The other hits him square in the spark chamber.

Two bodies hit the ground.

The entire fight stops. Prowl and Jazz as one turn and stare at Optimus, who stands there with his gun out. He mimes blowing smoke off the barrel.

“I think that settles things.”

Prowl grins. “Don’t make me laugh. It hurts to laugh.”

The human team arrives just as Ratchet approaches and kneels down beside Prowl. Lennox stares up at them. “Oh. You’re Prime. Holy hell, you’re tall.”

Optimus laughs at that. “You must be Lennox. A pleasure to meet you in person.”

“Likewise. Here to collect your team?”

“Yes. I don’t believe there are any stray Decepticons around that the team hasn’t handled.”

“Starscream.” Hound says. “But I imagine he’ll come to us before we go. He was smart and bailed early.”

“Well, Prowl did use him as a batterin’ ram.” Jazz chuckles. “Ah’d bail too.”

“That’s not what you did last time.” Prowl retorts.

That sets both human and mech teams off, eliciting loud protests and Jazz’s howling laughter.

Optimus can only smile.

tonight we are victorious

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Getting off the planet is easier than Prowl figured it would be.

Ratchet patches him up. The dagger cut near his fuel pump, but not close enough to do any damage. A scare, to be sure, but nothing as bad as it could have been. Good thing, too – death by drone is a piss-poor way to go. Optimus deals with the negotiations and politics. Jazz and Bee make sure the transport doesn't leave anything the humans shouldn't get their hands on.

That was an interesting conversation to have with Lennox.

"I'm surprised you don't want at least some weapons information. Something to give your team an edge."

"If I could guarantee my team would be the only ones to keep it. But humans like to hurt each other – we kinda suck that way. So it's best if we don't have any of it."

"I can understand that. We do the same thing."

Honestly, the only thing Prowl is going to miss about this small, organic planet is Lennox.

"Orele!"

"Fig, for the last time – *we don't speak Spanish!"*

He grins. Well, Lennox and probably Fig. If only because of Bluestreak. The sniper is leaning against the side of the transport, Fig up on his shoulder taunting Lennox in Spanish, while Lennox throws things at him, laughing the entire time. Bluestreak is egging Fig on, also in Spanish.

"Probably a good thing Lennox is throwing Nerf balls." Jazz says, coming to sit on the steps of the transport beside Prowl. "He takes out Blue's optic, he's gonna be pissed."

Prowl laughs. "Blue has better reflexes than that." he say with a grin. "I'm surprised Morshower is letting us go so easily."

“Eh, from what Ah gathered he’s like a human Optimus. Don’ want none of this alien shit on his turf.” Jazz chuckles. “Basically Prime’s just tellin’ him ta give us a bit ta load up an he’ll never see us again.” Prowl nods. Jazz nudges him with his shoulder. “What’s wrong? Ya still hurtin?”

“No. I’m almost healed up.” Prowl shakes his head. “Just something Deadshot said.”

“About what?”

“That Shockwave was the reason Megatron was even looking for the AllSpark in the first place.” Prowl turns enough to look Jazz in the optic. “We’ve seen what that thing can do. But that wasn’t really Barricade that it brought back, right? It was just a newspark with only a hint of Barricade inside.” Jazz nods. Prowl continues. “So what would Shockwave have needed to do to actually be able to bring himself back like that, as he was, and not as just a drone?”

Jazz freezes for a moment. “Those ain’ nice thoughts.”

“That’s an understatement.”

“Sounds like a job fer when we get back home.” Jazz says with a sigh. “Honestly, we jus’ ended a civil war. Ah think we deserve ta not think about shit like that fer a while.”

Prowl chuckles and reaches out over their bond. /I can think of other things we could think about./ He sends a bit of heat with the thought, and Jazz barely manages to suppress a shiver.

/Careful, Prowler, or we’re gonna be givin’ th’ humans a crash-course on Cybertronian reproduction./ he warns, but the playfulness and the heat is more than returned. /We wouldn’ wanna scar Bluestreak./

/If the Twins were here, he’d scar us in return./ Prowl laughs. /But you’re right. We shouldn’t corrupt the innocent./

At that moment, Optimus walks over, interrupting the banter. “A few more days and we’ll be ready to leave.” he says. “Our transport isn’t too far away. Morshower said he would provide us with an escort to the location.”

“Ya worried they might try ta pull somethin’, boss?”

“Not really. They’d be stupid to, considering Lennox’s team is to be

our escort.”

Prowl smirks. “Yeah, they won’t do anything. Has Starscream showed back up yet?”

“Yep. Ratchet has him at the transport. Disconnected his transformation cog, so he won’t be too much of a threat for a while at least.” Optimus sighs. “It’s hard to believe it’s all over now. At least that part of it.”

“There’s still work to be done.” Prowl muses. “Uprisings to put down, that sort of thing.”

“At least for a while.” Optimus points out. “Eventually, you’ll have to figure out what you’re going to do when this is all over.”

Prowl and Jazz exchange looks. Jazz grins. “Ya pushin’ fer grand-sparklin’s, Prime?”

“Oh shut the hell up. The last thing Cybertron needs is mechs that are part you, part Prowl running around. Primus above.”

“Would that be better or worse than part Mirage, part Hound?” Prowl wonders. Prime’s responding groan has Jazz and Prowl cracking up.

At that moment, Hound and Mirage return from their brief patrol. Mirage gives Jazz a look before turning his attention to Optimus. “So, are we ready to go?”

Prime laughs and nods.

“Yeah. We’re ready to go.”

Chapter End Notes

> And that's the end! Thank you guys so much for keeping up with this story. I'm glad you've enjoyed it! There will be a sequel coming up, but I'm taking a small break from fanfiction, so it'll be a while. In the meantime, keep an eye out for a prompt-based one-shot series that I'll be putting up towards the end of next month. I'm moving in between now and then, so hopefully by then everything will have calmed back down.
>
> Stay safe, stay healthy, and until next time, I remain yours truly,
>
> Shadowblade-tara

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!